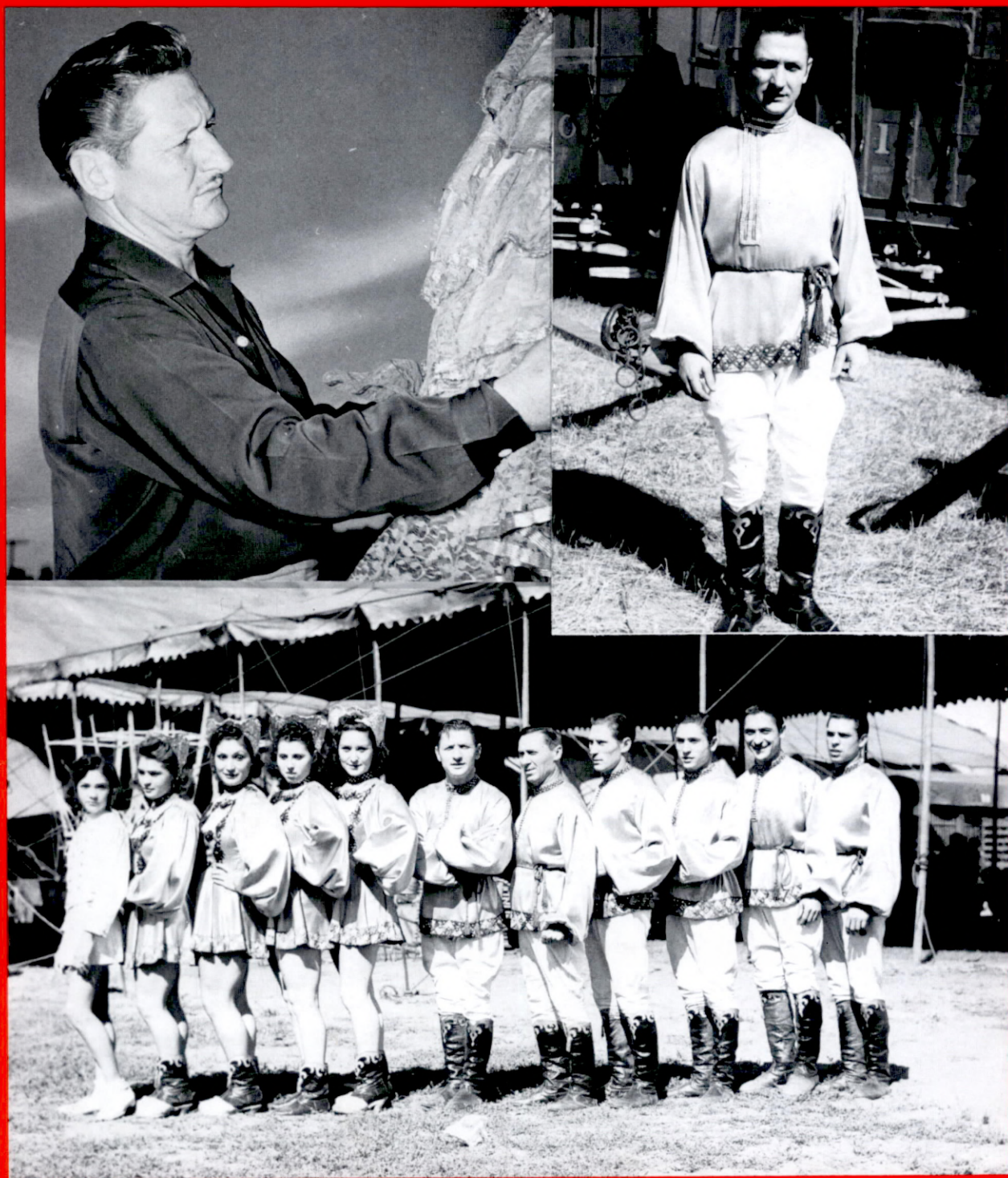


# Bandwagon

THE JOURNAL OF  
THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

March-April 1990



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### THIS MONTH'S COVER

Lucio Cristiani is one of the greatest circus stars ever. A sensation in his American debut on Ringling-Barnum in 1934, he was a show stopper for three decades on numerous troupes including Hagenbeck-Wallace, Al G. Barnes, Cole Bros., and those owned by his family.

His most unbelievable feat was a somersault from one horse completely over a second to the back of a third while all three were running in echelon inside a forty two foot ring. No one else has ever accomplished this trick. He defined bareback riding, and like Codona on the flying trapeze and Beatty in the fighting wild animal act, he is the standard against which all others were measured. As John Daniel Draper, the leading scholar of equestrian acts, has written: "The greatest tribute that can be given to Lucio is to say that to have not seen him perform was to have missed a chance of a lifetime." In that spirit *Bandwagon* salutes this all time great rider and fine gentlemen who today continues in the business working with his wife Gilda in her uncaged leopard act.

The photo of the Cristiani family and the one of Lucio in costume were taken on Ringling-Barnum in 1939. The other shot was taken during his tenure as general manager of the Cristiani Bros. Circus in 1959.

### THE PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

As I enter the presidency I find that the *Bandwagon* has a number of diverse articles on hand. Historians have had use of new technologies--computers and photo copiers--over the last few years. The availability of microfilm has made the *New York Clipper*, *Billboard*, newspapers and obscure publications available to researchers. The Circus World Museum's great library has created unprecedented access to data. All these advances have made it much easier than ever before to document the history of the circus.

Quality research takes time, and a knowledge of available sources. A good time to learn more about the existence of primary materials is at the annual convention. Quite a few of the holes in my own research have been filled at our annual meeting by talking to the right person regarding a particular document. I hope that many of you will attend the Ann Arbor, Michigan convention on June 21-23. If there is enough interest we will circulate a list of research inquiries at the meeting. I'm convinced we can help out one another.

As an example, I was recently asked about advertising and trade tokens used by circuses. I was able to tell the ques-

tioner that metal trade tokens were often used by shows to avoid paying hard cash and were good at the commissary, the cookhouse and the concession stands. They circulated only on the show, although some were given to local workers who assisted in set-up. They turn up at coin and token shows, although collectors are more likely to find ones from carnivals rather than circuses. Advertising tokens were used back into the 18th century, and were issued by any number of circuses including L. B. Lent, Barnum and London, P. A. Older, and even Ricketts.

I hope to write an article on this subject. If you own any circus tokens please take a pencil and obtain a rubbing of the face and reverse, and print the text. Drop me a note at 5980 Lannoo, Detroit, Michigan 48236 so we can begin to document this little known part of circus history.

Getting a new presidency under way is difficult but with the assistance of Vice-President Fred Dahlinger and Secretary-Treasurer Johann Dahlinger, the coming convention is already well in hand.

### 1990 CHS CONVENTION

Plans are progressing well for the 1990 Circus Historical Society convention to be held at Ann Arbor, Michigan from June 21-23. The three days of activities will include historical papers, movies, the auction, the banquet, the Kelly-Miller Circus, and special features.

A highlight will be a tour of the world famous Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in nearby Dearborn. Members will have the choice of entering the Ford Museum with its great automotive exhibit, trains, the John Robinson calliope, and just about every invention under the sun, or enjoying the vast outdoor historical panorama that is presented in Greenfield Village. Conventioneers will be able to leave the Museum or Village to attend a showing of rare circus posters, and return to where they left as part of the day. When registering, members will choose which site they wish to visit.

Auction items are requested. You can bring them to the hotel or send them in advance to John Polacsek, Convention Chairman, 5980 Lannoo, Detroit, Michigan 48236. The auction proceeds allow the *Bandwagon* to provide our members with quality circus history articles and lots of them. Likewise, those wishing to present a paper at the meeting should also contact Polacsek.

Please fill out the registration card found in this issue as soon as possible. The card for the Ramada Inn should also be completed in a timely fashion and sent directly to the hotel. This will be the only chance to register as nothing concerning

the convention will appear in the May-June *Bandwagon*.

For those planning to come through the Detroit Metro Airport, there is a special 40% discount rate which has been arranged with Northwest Airlines along with special convention rates for rental cars. A plane reservation hotline 1-800-937-8687 is in effect from 9 a. m. to 5 p. m. EST. Ask for the Circus Historical Society counselor. If you are driving from the west or south, leave a little early and stop to see the Magic Museum in Marshall, Michigan. It has a terrific collection of magic memorabilia, posters, and props which should not be missed.

### DUES NOTICES MAILED

Secretary-Treasurer Johann Dahlinger has sent out the dues notices for the fiscal year starting May 1, 1990. Members have the opportunity to show their support for the Circus Historical Society by becoming Sustaining, Contributing, and Concessionaires Club members by paying \$25, \$50 or \$100, rather than the standard rate of \$17. Members who pay these amounts will receive a special certificate of appreciation as well as the knowledge that they have done a good deed.

Last year over 200 members honored themselves and their organization by joining in one of the three special categories. This brought an extra \$3200 into the treasury, every penny of which was plowed into the *Bandwagon*. The result was a record breaking year for the *Bandwagon* which published more circus history than every before. It also allowed the CHS to

refrain from a dues increase and to finish the year with a surplus in the treasury.

We had another sensational year in 1989. With your help we can continue to make the CHS and the *Bandwagon* even bigger and better in 1990.

### NEW MEMBERS

David Carlyon 815-1/2 Lincoln St. Evanston, IL 60201	3576
Fred Rockwell 14011 Minnock Dr. Redford, MI 48239	3577
Peter G. Clark 405 Middletown Ave. Wethersfield, CT 06109	3578
Henry Jones 32182 Machado St. Lake Elsinore, CA 92330	3979
Richard L. Bailey 9130 S.W. Pioneer Ct., Suite D Wilsonville, OR 97070	3580
Shag Shadley 321-1/2 N. Vermilion #3 Danville, IL 61832	3581
Bill Gillam 1922 W. Midlothian Blvd. Youngstown, OH 44511	3582
Elizabeth Sturmak 4012 Serene Way Louisville, KY 40219	3583

Alan Roocroft  
Sam Diego Wild Animal Park  
15500 San Pasqual Valley Rd.  
Escondido, CA 92027

3584

### CORRECTIONS

Due to a computer mixup two lines were dropped in the Clyde Beatty article in the January-February issue. The beginning of the bottom paragraph of the middle column on page 39 should have read: "The eventful season of 1934 gave way to the frantic pace of establishing an entirely new circus over a few months. The remarkable birth of the Cole Bros.-Clyde Beatty Circus is well documented." Our apologies to author Joanne Carol Joes.

At least four errors appeared in the season's review in the same issue, all the fault of the author. Patricia Gatti's circus was titled Circus Gatti, not American Continental. The Denver Shrine date was played by the Johnny Jordan Circus, not George Carden. The circuses operated by Serge Coronas and George Coronas were separate companies, not two units of the same organization. The Flying Ibarra in the photo on page 24 is Alejandro, not Jaime.

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**T**his show was covered briefly as a supplement to the author's article on the Frank J. Taylor Circuses in the May-June, 1963 Bandwagon. The Taylor circus of 1925, owned by the Consolidated Circus Corporation of Omaha, Nebraska, Frank J. Taylor, Jr., president, provided the bulk of the physical equipment when the Cook & Cole show was framed two years later. Readers are urged to review that article for the background of the show and its equipment.

The Frank J. Taylor Circus of 1925 had a short life. The eleven car show opened May 23 at Albright, Nebraska and closed less than one month later June 20 at Wahoo, Nebraska. The property was then returned to the show's quarters at South Omaha. Shortly thereafter it was offered for sale as a complete unit by the Consolidated Circus Corporation, and numerous advertisements were carried in the *Billboard*. A complete inventory of equipment was prepared for prospective buyers. None came forward until the early months of 1927 when the show was acquired by a trio composed of Leo E. Crook, Arthur Hoffman (Heritage), and R. M. Harvey. Within a few weeks a new circus was organized and titled Cook & Cole Three Ring Circus at the Taylor quarters in South Omaha. It was on fifteen cars, four more than the 1925 Frank J. Taylor Circus, but the life of the show was shorter, playing only ten stands before going broke.

Leo E. Crook of New York City was the principal owner and was said to have invested \$40,000, his life savings, which was lost in the venture. Both Hoffman and Harvey put up only token funds, their interest in the new show being primarily in services. Hoffman as back on the show as joint manager and Harvey heading the advance.

Crook was formerly with the Ringling organization and had spent eighteen years with it in the concession department. He

Cook & Cole Circus wagons lined up at the Fairmont, Minnesota fairgrounds about 1928. Second from left is the former Al G. Barnes ticket wagon and third is the Forepaugh-Ringling-Gollmar two tier tableau. Joe Rettinger collection.

had no previous experience as a circus manager which was probably why he selected Arthur Hoffman to join him in the new venture. Hoffman, his real name Heritage, was from Burlington, North Carolina, in his middle 40s, and for ten years had been

with Mugivan and Bowers circuses, often operating side shows. He had owned and operated his own circus in 1926, a fifteen car show titled Heritage Bros. (See my article on the Heritage Bros. Circus in the March-April, 1969 *Bandwagon*). The equipment for the show had come from Jerry Mugivan and his associates and he held a mortgage on it. Mugivan suddenly repossessed the show at Stafford, Kansas, August 28, 1926, while it was still on the road. Hoffman stated that action was illegal as he was not behind in his payments and sued Mugivan for \$20,000. He later settled out of court for \$3,500 plus costs, so Hoffman would have had some funds available to put into the new Cook & Cole show.

R. M. Harvey was fifty-eight years old and had the reputation of being one of the top general agents in the business. He had a wealth of circus experience, holding important positions since as early as 1896 as

assistant contracting agent on Great Wallace. Since then he had served as general agent for Barnum & Bailey and Hagenbeck-Wallace. In 1918 he was general manager of Coop & Lent, and in early-mid 20s was general agent and traffic manager for Sells-Floto. An article could be written on Harvey's circus experience prior to the 1927 Cook & Cole and a book on his later exploits.

As mentioned the F. J. Taylor Circus moved on eleven cars and Cook & Cole added four more. A comparison of the number and type of rail cars is as follows.

Type car	1925 Taylor train	1927 Cook & Cole train
Advance	1	1
Stocks	2	4
Flats	5	6
Coaches	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
	11	15

# Cook and Cole CIRCUS

Season of 1927

By Joseph T. Bradbury





R. M. Harvey, general agent and co-owner of the Cook & Cole Circus. Pfening Archives.

In the original Taylor train the two stock cars had come from Fred Buchanan, owner of Robbins Bros. Circus. Some flats were acquired from the C. W. Parker carnival property at Leavenworth, Kansas. But the rest of the train is believed to have come from William P. Hall of Lancaster, Missouri and the Venice Transportation Company of East St. Louis, Illinois.

The two stock cars Crook and his partners added came from Fred Buchanan. It is not known definitely the source of the additional flat car and coach but they were probably from Hall or Venice. No photos picturing either the Taylor or Cook & Cole trains have turned up.

Unfortunately for Crook the Taylor rail cars as well as other properties needed a lot of work to put them into travelling condition. Harry Chipman who has been on the 1925 show remarked that the flats coming from C. W. Parker were in bad condition and little or nothing had been done to put them into top notch shape. Much of the rapid downfall of Cook & Cole was because so much of the bankroll had been expended getting the equipment into road condition.

In all probability the Taylor color scheme for the rail cars was retained, that being yellow with red lettering and black shading. The flats were all sixty foot wooden cars.

Part of the deal made with Taylor was that his South Omaha property could be used to frame the new show, so all work was done there. E. S. Patterson was in charge of the quarters' shops and later served as lot superintendent on the road.

The Taylor property included twenty-six vehicles among them a Fordson tractor, two chariots, a stage coach and possibly a water tank. The color scheme was yellow with title in red which was retained for most vehicles, however photos indicate some wagons were obviously painted red with white lettering.

The late Clarence C. Day, one of the first of the organized circus fans, was a distant cousin of the Taylors. He lived in the Omaha area and visited the circus quarters often. He remembered that Cook & Cole built a few new wagons to supplement the Taylor inventory. These were flat bed type vehicles with skeleton posts. One of these is pictured in the illustrations. They could be used for hauling seat lumber or other properties. There were probably three or four of these new wagons and were loaded on the additional flat car Cook & Cole had.

Canvas purchased from Taylor included a Baker & Lockwood big top, a 110 foot round with three 40s; menagerie top, a 70 with two 30s; side show, a 50 with one 40; marquee, 30 x 30 and a 30 x 70 cookhouse.

Seating consisted of fifteen lengths of blues and ten lengths of starbacks for reserves. There were three electric generators for lighting but they were probably not mounted on separate wagons.

The 1925 F. J. Taylor and 1927 Cook & Cole shows presented a similar appearance on the lot. The biggest difference between them was the considerably larger number of lead stock on the latter. It was noted that Taylor didn't have enough baggage horses to move easily to and from and on the lot, so Crook and his partners added more animals, not only baggage stock but also increased the entire lead stock department. Different counts exist, but Cook & Cole had between 30-40 horses, 26 ponies, 2 camels, a buffalo, zebra and perhaps more. Both horses and other lead stock were acquired from Fred Buchanan.

In 1925 Taylor had but one elephant, Frieda, which was leased from C. R. Lamont. Cook & Cole had four according to information furnished by Bill Woodcock, Sr. The herd leased from W. P. Hall included Tommy, Ding, Boo and the tusker Major. Clyde (Highpockets) Baudendistel came along to handle them. Highpockets was an excellent elephant man and presented an outstanding act which was a feature of the performance.

Complete details are not available on



Arthur Hoffman, manager and co-owner of the Cook & Cole Circus. Pfening Archives.

the financing of the several deals Crook made to obtain the equipment and animals. There is some information on this which was printed in local newspapers after the show folded. Most of the deals were lease-purchase, straight lease, or rentals. C. C. Day said that Taylor once told him that Crook paid cash for much equipment when a time purchase would have been all right with him.

Cook & Cole was said to have a strong and varied selection of animals consistent with that of a fifteen car show. In notes from Bill Woodcock, Sr. he listed ten cages, two more than Taylor. No details on the size of the cages were given but to have that many and only six flat cars they had to be very short, possibly of the cross cage type.

In the mid-late 1920s small and medium rail shows still paraded and Cook & Cole was no exception. Newspaper accounts claim it was a creditable march for a show of its size. The parade vehicles acquired from Taylor were utilized. A brief description of these is in order.

The No. 1 bandwagon, which happily is preserved in the Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin, was used to load the side show, and featured a circular mirror in the center with gold leaf carvings of dragons, lion heads, serpents and winged creatures. It was painted yel-

low and was probably a baggage wagon obtained from Hall or Buchanan which was rebuilt to serve as a bandwagon. Canvas was tacked to the sides of a crude baggage type wagon and carvings added at the Taylor quarters by Jim Babcock, transforming it into a neat looking parade vehicle.

The oldest and most historically important parade wagon was the old Forepaugh-Ringling-Gollmar-Barnes three decker tableau. This wagon was covered in the September-October-November, 1961 *Bandwagon* by the author and in the March-April, 1967 *Bandwagon* by Richard E. Conover. The wagon probably came from England to Forepaugh in 1879. The original configuration had three tiers with four mirrors on the bottom tier. It was sold to Ringling probably in 1890. By 1900 the top tier was eliminated. Before 1903 it had been completely rebuilt, with one mirror eliminated, leaving only three on the bottom tier. About 1905 it was transferred to the Ringling managed Forepaugh-Sells show. Shortly after that show retired from the road following the 1907 season the wagon was sold to Gollmar Bros. and remained through 1916. In early 1917 the show, including this wagon, was sold to James Patterson and appeared in the James Patterson-Gollmar Bros. show that season. In 1919 Patterson sold it to Al G. Barnes where it remained several seasons as the clown bandwagon. The exact route by which it went to Taylor in 1925 is uncertain, but possibly it came by way of Horne in Kansas City.

One Cook & Cole parade wagon had a full side painting of a trainer in a den of lions with carvings in the corners of the canvas. Another featured a full side painting of an Indian buffalo hunt in a western setting.

The Cook & Cole ticket wagon possibly made parade as it had a large painting of a lion on its sides. Bill Woodcock, Sr. was familiar with this historic vehicle. He said that when he was with Al G. Barnes in 1920 the show played Kansas City and the show acquired some new wagons that day. To make room on the train the show just left some of their older ones on the lot, including the yellow ticket wagon. He assumed Horne or someone in the Kansas City area picked it up, probably the Horne Zoological Garden Co., and from there later got to Taylor in 1925.

The earlier article on the Taylor show stated that the steam calliope with it had been the one on World



Cook & Cole elephants Tommy, Ding and Boo at the Hall Farm in 1927. Clyde Baudendistel is in center and Col. Bill Woodcock, Sr. is at right. Buckles Woodcock collection.

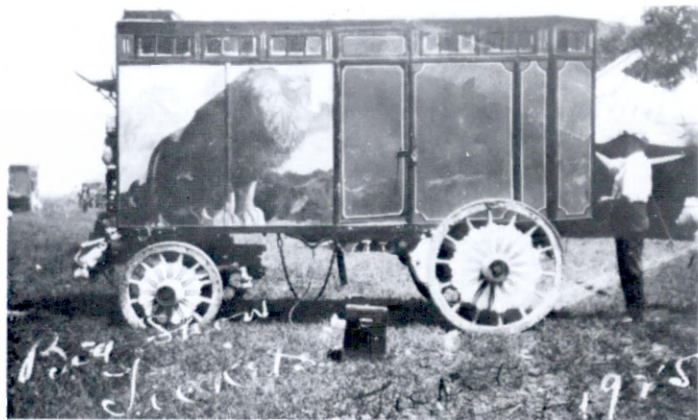
Bros. in 1923. It was later proved that this was not the case. Although there is no question the show had one, no known documentation indicates what it looked like.

While no hard evidence exists that Cook and Cole carried a steamer, a circumstantial case can be made that the one carried on F. J. Taylor was also used on Cook and Cole. This remains one of the many unsolved mysteries of circus wagon history.

R. M. Harvey headed the show's advance and laid out the 1927 route. A special line of paper was printed by National of Chicago and Standard of St. Paul.

The first public notice of the new show appeared in *Billboard* in a short piece dated Chicago, April 9, which was head lined, "Hoffman will manage Cook & Cole." It said that arrangements had been made to put out the Cook & Cole three-ring circus, a 15 car show. It would be

The Cook & Cole ticket wagon while it was on the F. J. Taylor Circus in 1925. Pfening Archives.



managed by Arthur Hoffman and R. M. Harvey would handle publicity and act as general agent. The show would stay west of the Mississippi. The article noted that there would be a big menagerie and side show, and the entire outfit would be equipped electric lights. It concluded stating special billing would be used.

In the same issue appeared an extensive two column advertisement

which read, "Cook & Cole's 3 Ring Circus wants for 15 car circus opening May 14, near Omaha: Performers (aerial, acrobatic, wire). Feature acts, riders with stock. Women for ladders. Menage and spectacle (Acts featuring women preferred). Domestic animal acts. Clowns with interments for band. Troupe of Japs or Mexicans. Acts must be high class and have first-class wardrobe. Want wild west people with stock and other concert feature. Side show, can use novelty acts, woman with snakes, colored band. Big show band, reputable bandmaster and musicians for 12 piece band. Bosses, want heads of all departments, including steward, boss hostler, trainmaster, boss canvasman, boss property man, electrician, blacksmith. Also want men to solicit banner advertising and to handle stands. Address: Arthur Hoffman, Manager Cook & Cole's Three Ring Circus, Paxton Hotel, Omaha, Neb.

"Wanted for advance--Energetic car manager and brigade agents, all around billers, including a few students, contracting agents and 24 hour man. Address R. M. Harvey, General agent, Cook & Cole's Circus, Paxton Hotel, Omaha, Neb."

It is interesting that in neither the article nor the advertisement was the name of Leo E. Crook mentioned. Also interesting was that evidently the show's entire staff and performers were to be located and hired within the short frame of five weeks.

However, a week later the show ran a *Billboard* ad which did list Leo E. Crook as one of the managers and also the show's opening date which had been set back a week. The ad read: "Cook & Cole's 3 Ring Circus. Wants one or two feature

acts. Can also use acts by domestic animals and women performers doing two or more acts. Legitimate privileges to let. Novelties for big show or side show and unusual pit show attractions can be placed. This show moves on fifteen cars and will open May 21 near Omaha, Neb. Address Cook & Cole's Circus. Arthur Hoffman and Leo E. Crook, Mgrs. Care Hotel Paxton, Omaha, Neb."

Finally, in the April 30 *Billboard* there was an article datelined Omaha, Nebraska which gave the first details on the show. It was headlined: "COOK & COLE CIRCUS TO OPEN MIDDLE OF MAY," and the article said that on account of planning to take the road later than the average circus, the work necessary on property of this show was just being given the finishing touches, and would be ready for the road the middle of May.

It continued: "Leo E. Crook, for several years on the staff of the Ringling Bros. Circus and the new Madison Square Garden in New York, has launched out on his own resources as a circus man, and has become identified with the Cook & Cole Circus. Mr. Crook, with Arthur Hoffman, will be the manager. E. S. Patterson, another well-known circus man, will be lot superintendent, and is at present in charge of the shops.

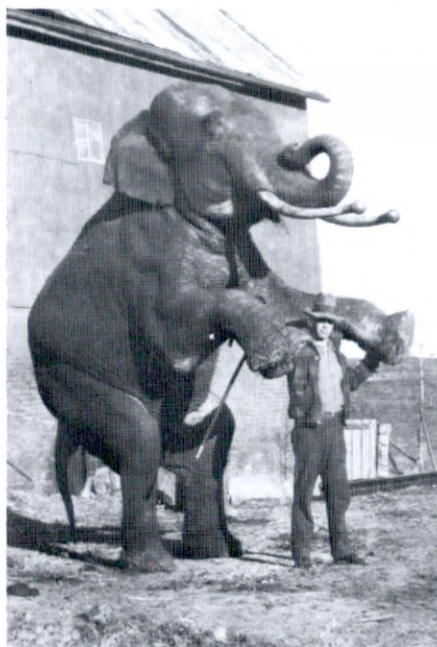
"The show will give a three ring performance, and, with the abundance of territory available for a 15 car show, R. M. Harvey, general agent, should not have any trouble fixing a most profitable route. A menagerie will be carried, including four elephants.

"The Joe Hodgini Troupe has contracted to put on the riding acts, and with many other acts already engaged of equally high standard with the Hodgini act, a creditable performance is assured. The street parade will be an attractive feature and there will be a special line of paper, now being printed by National of Chicago and Standard of St. Paul."

In the same *Billboard* was another very short piece which said that Leo Crook left New York last Saturday for Omaha, Nebraska, where it was understood he had acquired a substantial interest in the newly organized Cook & Cole Circus.

Finally in the April 30 issue was an advertisement which concentrated on the side show and concessions department. It read, "Cook & Cole 3 Ring Circus wants. Side show attractions and pit show. Fortune teller. Farm paper. Tin Types and all legitimate privileges to let. Want hamburger man, balloon men, candy butchers. Can use Scotch band and more useful performers for big show. Address Arthur Hoffman and Leo E. Crook, managers Cook & Cole Circus, Paxton Hotel, Omaha, Nebraska."

Very little other information appeared in the trade press prior to the show's opening. There was one very small ad that Frank P. Meister, bandmaster, wanted musicians for a 15 car show to open near Omaha. The first date of May 15 was given and no show title was mentioned. A short item said that Jimmy Keating and Billie Burke, female impersonators, were



Major, the big tusker with Cook & Cole in 1927, pictured here with Bill Woodcock, Sr., in 1928. Woodcock purchased the bull that year. Buckles Woodcock collection.

with the Cook & Cole Circus. Keating did a single contortion act and danced in the side show, and Burke was working the come-in, doing a swinging-ladder number and dancing in the kid show.

No opening day review of the show listing the staff and performers was published, but from notes in the E. W. Adams files, the Circus World Museum and various newspaper accounts we have been able to determine the names of the principal staff members plus those of the performers.

The staff, included C. H. Bauther, contracting agent; F. Van Allen, advance car manager; C. R. Bowman, 24 hour man; J. C. Ryan, legal adjuster; Jack H. Nation, side show manager; M. H. Brown, treasurer; J. H. Kerns, in charge of candy stands; K. B. Bear, steward; Dan White, boss canvasman; J. H. Smith, boss hostler; J. Kelly, boss props; H. Seymour, banners; Phil Jones, ringstock; Phil Martin, trainmaster; Bert Taylor, auditor; Frank Bacon, head ticket department; Mrs. Frank Bacon, in charge of wardrobe; Con Colleano,

Sr., in charge of privilege car on train and Frank Mumid, announcer.

A Mr. Martin was listed as equestrian director. In addition to this list there was also mention of a W. G. Byron and J. Bramson as legal adjusters, possibly assistants, or they could have been with the show at first and later were replaced by J. C. Ryan, who was definitely there when it closed. There is also a newspaper mention of A. T. Van Nyssen, an advance press contractor or publicity man.

Reports say the show had a fine performance which was highlighted by the Joe Hodgini troupe of four riders. Clyde (Highpockets) Baudendistel presented an outstanding elephant act using four animals. Phil King was producing clown and presented several numbers in the program. Other acts included Ward's trained mules, Foley's dogs and ponies, Cornellas acrobats, the Butterfly Ladies, and high school horses ridden by a Mrs. McCabe. The big show contributions by female impersonators Jimmy Keating and Billie Burke were noted earlier. All of these acts were mentioned in either the trade publication or newspaper accounts, but certainly there were others such as liberty horses, ponies and other equine numbers. Lee Ford was chief cowboy and in charge of the wild west numbers in both the main performance and the after-show.

The opening date was set for Manning, Iowa on May 21 and the official call advertisement came in the May 7 *Billboard*. It read: "CALL FOR COOK & COLE'S CIRCUS. All people engaged for this circus report to Manning, Iowa, May 16, unless otherwise advised. Show opens May 21. Workingmen in all departments come on. Candy butchers and balloon men wanted. Acknowledge call to Manning, Iowa."

The show opened as scheduled on May 21. Its life was short and the show folded June 1 at Fairmont, Minnesota. The complete route was as follows:

- May 21-Manning, Iowa.
- May 22-Sunday.
- May 23-Carroll, Iowa.
- May 24-Eagle Grove, Iowa.
- May 25-Humbolt, Iowa.
- May 26-Britt, Iowa.
- May 27-Waseca, Minnesota.
- May 28-Montgomery, Minnesota.
- May 29-Sunday.
- May 30-Grand Meadow, Minnesota.
- May 31-Wells, Minnesota.
- June 1-Fairmont, Minnesota.

A number of other Minnesota stands which had been booked were cancelled due to the closing. The show had been scheduled to play Blue Earth the day following Fairmont and was due to be in St. Peter, the home base of George Engresser's Zellmar Bros. Circus, on June 8.

The *Billboard* ran a short notice dated

June 2 which said the Cook & Cole Circus had closed in Fairmont the day before due to bad weather and poor business. It mentioned that J. C. Ryan, the show's legal advisor, was on the scene and had gone among the local merchants and solicited food and money. Two meals were served the day following the close. Ryan also helped start a relief fund to take care of the showfolk and was looking after the caged animals.

A more complete article appeared in *The Billboard* datelined Fairmont, Minnesota, June 11 and headed "Two Benefits Given for Cook & Cole Folk." The story ran as follows: "The Cook & Cole Three Ring Circus has closed, as was briefly mentioned in last week's issue. Its career was brief, the bankroll short and its finish sad.

"On Monday two benefit performances were given in behalf of the stranded showfolk, the performers participating in the program. One dollar admission was charged and \$1,200 was realized.

The local committee consisted of J. E. Haycraft, F. J. Edwards, H. E. Eade, C. F. Gaarenstroom and A. M. Nelson.

"Performers write that although the benefit was supposed to be given entirely by the city people, when it came to paying off they were requested to sign a Cook & Cole Circus receipt in full.

"With the Frank J. Taylor outfit at Omaha, Nebraska, as a nucleus, other property leased from Fred Buchanan, Col. Hall and the Venice Transportation Company, in addition to much property bought and owned by Leo E. Crook, the Cook & Cole Circus made a most formidable showing on the lot, being a very inspiring piece of show property. The performance was extremely creditable and the array of bosses and heads of departments very capable men of experience. An electric light plant was carried, in fact it was a modern, up-to-date outfit.

"Leo E. Crook, formerly connected with the Ringling Circus in the concession department, was the financial sponsor. He is reported to have invested upwards of \$30,000, apparently ambitious to have as good an outfit as there was on the road. His investments in show property and the cost of repairing the Taylor property exhausted his bankroll sooner than was anticipated by him. Consequently when it came time to launch the advance department and to provide means for the publicity department to invite the public to the show, the funds, it is said had been so depleted that at no time was the advance equipped with the necessary ammunition for its use.

"In spite of these handicaps, Mr. Crook was enthusiastically optimistic and continued ambitious. Arthur Hoffman, the other manager of the show, worked his best and struggled to make his associates hopes come true, but with continued cold, wet weather, and other obstacles, the show was forced to close here June 2.



The Ringling two tier tableau on Gollmar-Patterson in 1917. Pfening Archives.

"All local bills were paid in every town. The only indebtedness is to the people on the payroll and to a few others with the show who very loyally and generously advanced cash to the show to help it along until it got an even break. The territory being played was fresh and the Robbins Bros. Circus was in the same territory at the same time and was doing a most profitable business, but at no time were the stands of the two shows closer together than forty miles.

"Fred Buchanan, of the Robbins show, visited the Cook & Cole Circus at Wells, Minnesota, and when the show closed at Fairmont he sent Robert Schiller over to look after his interests, and Bert Taylor, who was on the show, is looking after the interests of his brother, Frank J. Taylor.

"The Cook & Cole Circus was pronounced by the several hundred people with it as comprising as neat a 15 car show as was ever seen anywhere. It was moving well, the people with it were loyal and hopeful to the very last. The train consisted of four sleepers, four stock and six flat cars and one advance car. Much of the property and stock will be stored for a few weeks at Fairmont.

"Arthur Hoffman is returning to his home at Peru, Indiana, before he decides what he will do for the rest of the season. Mr. Crook expects to rejoin his family in New York, and R. M. Harvey is likewise going east."

In addition to the limited *Billboard* coverage of the events at Fairmont we are most fortunate to have available the information gathered by Joseph S. Rettinger. He made a personal visit to Fairmont in the 1970s, placed newspaper ads there seeking photos and information on the Cook & Cole demise, and lately has worked closely with the Martin County Historical Society. Ms. Helen Simon, curator of the Society was most helpful in providing xeroxes of the considerable newspaper coverage of the three local newspapers operating in Fairmont in 1927. While there was some duplication in the three newspapers' coverage, each story spotlights different angles through the various interviews and would pick up bits and pieces of information not found elsewhere. By putting all of this together we can compile a pretty full account of the folding of the show.

On June 1, show date, the *Martin County Independent* gave prominent space to a front page reader furnished by the show which was headlined, "Thousands Line Curb, Big Turnout to See Circus Train Unload. Streets Are Lined with Youngsters and Grownups To See The Parade. Old Major Is Here. Crowds Journey to Fairgrounds to Watch the Big Top Go Up Once More."

It might be noted that had these "thousands" attended the circus then the show would no doubt have had the necessary funds to keep going, but in reality the turnout was very disappointing as other articles will show. The show reader said much about the usual—"Roaring lions, funny monkeys, big elephants, white faced clowns and bareback riders, riding ladies in fluffy skirts, camels, tigers and screeching calliopes are all here today for the Cook & Cole circus has come to town. This was one morning when there was no need to call the junior members of the household twice for breakfast. They were all out bright and early to watch the circus train come in. The show played in Wells yesterday and arrived here at 5:30 this morning.

"Most of the town's youngsters were on hand, to watch the miracles of unloading and dissembling the equipment to get ready for the big show."

The article noted the parade was scheduled for eleven o'clock and a large crowd was out on the streets some time before the lead band appeared. Crowds were lined all along the route of the parade. There was an interesting bit con-

cerning the elephants, Major in particular.

"Old Major, perhaps the oldest living circus elephant, was even more playful this morning than usual. He appeared to be enjoying himself as he was taken from his car at an early hour. He squirted water from his trunk on a score of kiddies who were close at hand to watch the unloading operations. There is something historical about old Major. He was among the first circus elephants to be imported and trained in this country. He is pensioned now after his long service. He is merely there for the folks to look at as they pass through to the main tent.

"He has been fed more peanuts by the crowd attending circuses than any other elephant alive., it is claimed. His mates do the work and Old Major stands by at ease. Four other performing elephants make up the herd." (There were only four, not five with the show.)

All of this copy was of course written by R. M. Harvey, who was one of the best in the business. It was flowery stuff and the author who as a youngster just learning to read back in 1927 well remembers the magical effect this kind of publicity had on a young circus fan just beginning what would become a lifetime obsession.

Continuing the circus day story it mentioned, "there were a number of lions, tigers, monkeys, ostriches, camels, and other animals in the menagerie department that could not be taken to the parade.

"As the features of the show were listed, it was found that a thirty piece band [about half that size in reality] offered free concerts, there was a number of class acrobatic acts to give free outdoor exhibitions, many famous riders were included on the program and there was the king of clowns represented.

"In the way of features, the Cook & Cole circus offers more than the ordinary show. They carry many high priced acts. Joe Hodgini, famous rider and his troupe of four are the feature performers.. Then there is that train [often used in place of herd] of Cook & Cole elephants. 'High-pockets,' the well known trainer, actually puts his head in the elephant's mouth and is carried about the ring. There is only one other living trainer who dares perform this stunt.

"Then there is the Butterfly Ladies, the world's most famous pair of air artists. Phil King and his famous clowns are sure to please the kiddies and grown folks alike.

"Ward's trained mules, another act secured for the sole entertainment of the children, is one of the highest paid acts in the circus business.

"Foley's dogs and ponies perform in the ring. Then there are the High School horses, ridden by Mrs. McCabe. Cornella's ac-

robats perform many times during the show."

The article concluded by saying the show had "many more features than one generally finds in the smaller circuses. They are bound to entertain and amuse the youngsters as well as the grown-ups."

The following day the Fairmont *Daily* and *Sentinel's* June 2 edition had huge headlines running across the entire front page, "CIRCUS GOES BROKE HERE-300 FOLK STRANDED." In the far right column there were sub heads, "Creditors in scramble for show's cash," Cook & Cole outfit slated at Blue Earth today, still here; Bad weather hits Omaha organization, elephants far from home--Owner comes after zebra." The text which ran the length of the front page and well into another read as follows: "Cook & Cole circus didn't show at Blue Earth as advertised.

"The closing performance occurred at the Fairmont fair grounds last evening.

"The show went broke.

Newspaper advertisement used for Cook & Cole final stand in Fairmont, Minnesota. Circus World Museum collection.



FEATURING  
THE LATEST  
IMPORTATIONS  
OF THE  
WORLD'S  
ARENIC STARS  
**PARADE DAILY  
AT NOON**

DOORS OPEN TO  
MENAGERIE  
AT  
1 AND 7 P.M.  
PERFORMANCE  
AT  
2 AND 8  
P.M.

**MOST GIGANTIC  
HIGHEST CLASS CIRCUS TO  
VISIT THIS SECTION IN  
RECENT YEARS.**

*A Big Show*



**Fairmont  
Wednesday, June 1  
Afternoon and Night**

"Today the whole outfit is stranded in Fairmont and 300 woebegone employees, busted and bedraggled, are unwilling temporary residents of the city. This would be a good time to take a census.

"Most of the refugees are wondering woefully 'when do we eat' and figuring where they are going to sleep tonight.

"Fourteen railroad cars are loaded with the show's property on the Northwestern (C & NW) tracks but the rolling stock doesn't roll. Jones isn't here to pay the freight. [The show had moved in from Wells, Minnesota on the Milwaukee Railroad (C.M. & St. P.) and evidently the train had been interchanged over to the Northwestern track which would take it to Blue Earth. Rail movements were a cash transaction and without payment in advance, no transportation. The same thing would happen to Floyd King's ten car Cole Bros. three years later when the show became stranded in Scottsville, Kentucky in August 1930 because he didn't have enough cash to pay the railroad.]

"Furthermore, a lot of attachments are outstanding to hold the property as many creditors scramble desperately for the money they have coming.

"The Cook & Cole outfit was started at Omaha this spring by R. M. Harvey, a newspaper man of Perry, Iowa, Arthur Hoffman and Leo E. Crook. There isn't any Mr. Cole or Mr. Cook. That's just a trade name like Mary Garden or Mark Twain. [A good title had been selected because both the names of Cook and Cole had been prominent in circus history with many shows having those names in their titles.]

"The Messers Harvey et. al. are old circus officials and good fellows who got tired of seeing the boss make all the jack while they did all the work. So they got together some canvas, rented a train of railroad cars, leased some animals, acrobats etc. here and there and took to the road last month.

"They had no trouble in engaging a few hundred willing workers who hankered for the thrilling life of circus folks. It promised to be a lot of fun. But even the clowns who jested so lustily but yesterday could see nothing funny in the situation today. The 40 or 50 colored employees declared that the situation looked very dark.

"The bosses were reluctant to talk to newspapermen today--quite a change since yesterday when they were looking for boosts for the greatest show on earth--pretty near. However rumor was busy and gave out a lot of reports.

"The show hit hard luck from the opening day of the season. Weather, roads, and lack of interest on the part of the public, aided by some slight deficiencies in



the show itself are said to have created a deficit of \$20,000 in operating expenses. Sounds reasonable. The outfit certainly lost a lot of money here.

"Yesterday local people who had furnished supplies, the circus lot, newspaper advertising and other necessary commodities got nervous. They raided the box office and the circus folks pulled a counter attack on the few hundred people who were lured into the tents. But it was no use, insistent creditors rushed to law offices and got out attachments and other legal papers. The court had to get up early this morning to sign papers. The jig was up and the stuff was off.

"Much of the property belonged to the large Robbins Bros. show at Watertown, South Dakota today. R. F. Schiller of the Robbins show arrived at 2 a. m. today to look after their interests. He salvaged the baby camel and striped African zebra and hired a truck from the Mathwig line to take these animals to Watertown today.

"Forty or fifty colored canvasmen and roustabouts got a bit ugly this morning when they found what they were up against. The crap game had long since broken up and the ghost hadn't walked for them in four weeks and limped pitifully then. [The ghost walking reference was an old circus saying indicating pay day. However, none would have been entitled to four weeks pay as the show had only been out less than two weeks.] The freaks sort of stood around dejectedly and the equestriennes and acrobates, minus rouge and spangles but otherwise attired, did not act so chic.

"Handouts were freely sought at the hash houses. Those of the refugees who had memberships were busily using their lodge connections in the Knights of Pythias, the Woodman, Mystic Workers, Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise and other friendly societies that are supposed to help a fellow out when he is in hard luck and his dues are paid. Fairmont lodge members stripped themselves of insignia early in the day.

Line of nine Cook & Cole wagons at the fairgrounds in Fairmont about 1928. Joe Rettinger collection.

"Most of the help was recruited at Des Moines and elsewhere in Iowa. The four elephants, which know their stuff, are the farthest from home. Their stable is away back in Massachusetts. [The local reporters missed the beat here. Of course the elephants were from W. P. Hall's place in Missouri, not Massachusetts.]

"Some of the property was sold here for what it would bring in cash. Scobe King bought the best team and insists he paid more than they were worth. The ponies were in demand but nobody seemed to want the hyena.

"There were many applications for vacant baseball positions.

"Representatives of other circus promoters were in Fairmont this morning when separation and division of the property was brought about. [It was mentioned that many of the cars and wagons belonged to a man named McCanon at Harley, Iowa and he had his agent here to see none of his property was removed without consent. [Who this man was is not known, but it is believed again the reporters got the facts wrong. Harley is near Omaha and possibly was someone connected with Frank J. Taylor, but since Bert Taylor was on the show as auditor this doesn't add up.]

"The four 'bulls' as circus people call the elephants, constitute the greatest part of the menagerie and are worth \$8,000 each. A telegram from their owner this morning put them in charge of their keeper.

"Two carloads of horses, property of Robbins Bros. Circus, were unloaded about 8 a.m. and taken to the fairgrounds where they will be kept until the Robbins circus needs them and they will be picked up. R. F. Schiller, Robbins representative, said much of the other equipment also belonged to his firm and that stuff would be left here until they came this way to pick them up.

"He said the Robbins circus might play this town later in the season and if they did not play here they would be in the vicinity so that transportation of the stuff would be an easy matter.

"We have ten elephants of our own and don't need these,' Schiller said. 'If we needed them we would take them. We also have enough of these other animals and all we wanted was the zebra and the baby camel.'

"The baby camel was the center attraction for several

hundred local men and boys who thronged the train all morning. The spindlylegged, shaggy haired little fellow is only eight weeks old and he drinks milk out of a quart bottle with a huge rubber nipple fitted over the opening. The camel and a huge great dane dog are inseparable companions and they sleep together.

"At noon today some of the officials ordered construction of a hamburger stand where the hungry workmen and actors lined up for coffee and hot dogs. They were a famished lot as last night was the last time they had eaten.

"Dis is a fine mess, ain't it,' said one veteran of the canvas top, speaking in typical New Yorkese. 'I been in de game for thoity years an' dis is de foist time I ever wit a show that went brok. Wat ya going to do.'

The far left column of the front page of this same issue was likewise devoted to Fairmont's major story and contained sub headings reading:

"Circus owner 'loses' \$40,000, life savings; Leo E. Crook, 18 years with Ringlings, drops it in ten days; 2 partners also are big losers in venture; and late season, continued rainy weather keeps audiences away."

The article went on to say that Crook lost a lifetime savings in the last month.

"I saved my money and this spring I had \$40,000 with which we started,' he said. 'Now I'm broke, broke flat.'

"As he spoke he turned his pocketbook out with a gesture of disappear. His last \$10 bill he had just handed to Sheriff Guss H. Jorgenson, who promised to hire a watchman to guard the property on the cars."

The piece noted that Messers Crook, Hoffman and Harvey were seasoned circus men who known the business thoroughly. But they did not reckon with the weather which has been the worst in many years for traveling attractions. They were mired in town after town. The roads were so bad that their audiences were cut. Always they hoped for better luck.

"It costs money to move a 14 car train daily, sometimes for jumps of considerable length. To come here from Wells on the Milwaukee Railroad, about 45 miles, was nearly \$300. Special trains come high.

"That took nearly the last money the managers had. They expected Fairmont would give them a good crowd. It was a 'good town' they had heard. Their hopes were high as they lined up for the daily parade and made the bravest showing they could, concealing their hard luck with the grit of circus folk. Some of them had not been paid for this week.

"The afternoon audience was only about 200, farmers being busy in the fields and the roads none too good after recent rains. 'Maybe they will come to-night,' said the showmen, but the night crowd wasn't a great deal better.

"It was the finish for Cook & Cole.

"I guess I'll have to wire home for money," said Thomas Lynch nearly 2,000 miles from his domicile in Marblehead, Massachusetts. Lynch plays trombone in the band. His case is typical of 200 or 300 others.

"A circus laborer and a farmer were taken to jail today on complaint of one of the show bosses who alleged that the workman had sold some of the show's rope to the farmer. He withdrew his complaint when the farmer returned the rope. The laborer said he had money coming from the circus and he was going to get it while the getting was good. Officials did not take their names. They were in jail only a short time. Chief of Police Harry Miller made the arrests."

Still on the front page were two other shorter articles. One said that pay had been shy for two weeks and the circus folks were hard up. Shay Carrington, a cow puncher and buster of bucking bronchos in the wild west department, said they were hoping to get enough money for transportation back to winter quarters. He and his wife were buying a few groceries at a local store, preparing to 'rough it' until something turned up in their line.

"I have two good horses of my own with the outfit and I expect to stay in Fairmont a few days until I can find some other show to connect up with, or perhaps a rodeo," said Carrington. "Most of our outfit has gone two weeks without a cent of pay. We are about strapped."

The piece continued stating this was not Carrington's first experience with a "busted" show. He was with a show that blew up in Austin two years ago. "We are still waiting for our money," he said.

Asked why the employees did not attach some of the property, Carrington smiled.

"You see it is so easy to transfer the ownership of property, that it is next to impossible to find anything in the owner's name. By the time you get a certain item attached, you may learn that it belongs to somebody you never heard of. 'Taint right, but it's so.'"

The final article told the story of a tragic accident that occurred during the loading of the train the previous evening. It was headed "Circus Employee's Skull Fractured Between Wagons. John Blakeman, Fon du Lac, Wisconsin, near death in accident while loading cars."

"Crushed between two heavy circus wagons, John Blakeman, 26 year old circus laborer, this morning suffered a crushed skull, torn ligaments in his shoulder and crushed chest, his condition was considered grave by Dr. Gardner.

"The accident occurred about 1:30 a.m., when the wagons were being loaded on the cars. Blakeman was placing blocks under the wheels of one of the wagons when



No. 1 bandwagon used by Cook & Cole at the Circus World Museum in April 1961 shortly after its restoration. Joe Bradbury collection.

another was jerked up against it. He attempted to jump backward, but was too slow and the big vehicles came together, catching his head and shoulders between them."

The article went on to more fully describe in detail his injuries and noted that the only thing that saved his life was the width of his shoulders which took the force of the impact. It was noted that Blakeman joined the show the day before in Wells as a property man and wagon caretaker. The article concluded stating the injured man's home was at Fon du Lac, Wisconsin and his world possessions consisted of the working clothes he wore.

The June 2 issue of the *Martin County Independent* ran a huge headline "CIRCUS STRANDED IN FAIRMONT" with sub heads, "Continuous bad weather ends tramping, Acts leave and animals are taken away by the owners, Many are broke and money will be raised to take train to headquarters."

The story noted that Fairmont's circus fans were given an opportunity to witness a big show as it appeared after the finances had been depleted. At least a half dozen blanket attachments were placed on equipment and animals, the owners of the stock had called in their stuff, and railroad officials demanded their money before making another move. The piece noted that a stranded circus offered more legal entanglements and gave the public a chance to come in contact with more of the inside "dope" than was generally given in any other line of business. Cook & Cole Circus went even further than the ordinary show which had gone broke. Their arrangement with three other shows in the matter of animals and equip-

ment offer a chance for a big legal tangle. While this was being straightened out, 180 employees and actors lingered in Fairmont, some entirely broke and without means of living and others with enough money to tide them over. The sad story of the finish was told thusly.

"Rain, bad roads and the fact that practically all of the rural people were busy in the fields, held the attendance down until the show lost about \$1,000 a day from the time it started out. This was more than the

treasury could stand.

"When they reached Fairmont, most of the employees had money coming. The band, for instance, demanded pay. They started action, putting a legal blanket on four horses. The light attendance here only made matters worse. When the local bills were paid and the show was packed and ready to move on, it was found that there was no money to pay the railroad for the transfer. The show was scheduled for Blue Earth today. The money was lacking and not a wheel could be turned."

The article then related the story of the animals and equipment being owned by Robbins Bros., F. J. Taylor and William P. Hall. It was mentioned that Frank Dougherty was retained as attorney by these other firms to look after their interests. Also it was noted that when Robbins Bros. took some of their animals by truck

to Watertown, South Dakota, a number of canvasmen and helpers made the trip to join the show. The majority of the performers and workmen, however, were stranded.

Leo Crook told the press that those firms owning equipment were making arrangements to have it moved. "It is expected that money will be advanced today or Friday to have the cars moved to Omaha. With the train will probably go the employees who are still stranded here. He said if money could be raised those owning equipment would release their claims so the circus could continue but the railroad demands payment which at this time can not be made."

The story concluded by stating that employees were making an effort to round up their belonging. Acts leaving the show were getting their trunks checked on the regular trains. Others hurried about raising money for food. Everything was at a standstill with no one knowing exactly where he or she might go. The show had been out only a short time and the closing came unexpectedly. "Unless money is provided soon, Fairmont may be host to a circus for several days, in fact, part of the stock will be a fixture here."

The following day the Cook & Cole plight was still front page news in the June 3 Fairmont *Daily Sentinel* with the major article headed, "Circus Tangle Still Unsolved Lawyers Busy; Show Spends Third Day Here While Creditors War Over Remains; Crook Pays Off All Local Indebtedness; and Stranded Workmen Present a Problem for Feeding and Housing."

The story said that the close of the day found the problems unsolved, the fourteen loaded cars of circus property still on the Northwestern Railroad track and a hundred and fifty employees penniless, unsheltered and unfed except by contributions from the people of the city. Some of the show personnel who had funds left.

It was mentioned that Leo E. Crook appeared to have been abandoned by his nominal associates, R. M. Harvey and Arthur Hoffman, and was fighting the battle alone to protect the employees, lessors, mortgagees and possibly salvage some of the \$40,000 he sunk in the ill-starred enterprise. The article said "that by making every possible sacrifice Mr. Crook has

succeeded in paying every dollar of local indebtedness. All merchants and others who held contracts have been paid in full." In reviewing the complicated situation involving the property with F. J. Tay-

Crook outright, subject to Taylor's mortgage. Taylor, evidently feeling himself insecure, under his chattel mortgage, not yet due, has taken over without process the horses and placed them out to pasture here. Mr. Crook believes these should be restored to him with the privilege of selling them here and raising a few hundred dollars that would help greatly in unravelling the tangles of getting the property away from Fairmont.

"Taylor is seeking to ship the property he claims to Omaha and Buchanan would like to have his share shipped to Granger, Iowa. It is said steps are already underway to use the stuff in starting another circus outfit contemplated by Taylor and his associates. In the meantime most of the property is loaded on cars owned or controlled under lease by Mr. Crook and which cannot be moved by other claimants without a settlement or agreement with him."

Continuing the coverage it stated that Sheriff Jorgenson and The *Sentinel* started a fund which sought supplies for a liberal supper and breakfast for the show personnel. The circus cook set up his gasoline stove in the Northwestern yards and prepared the food.

"Last night the more favored of the crew slept in the four Pullman that were included in the circus train. The rest lay out under the wagons and flat cars. Rain during the night added to their discomfort, still there was no disorder."

The story went on stating that "Fairmont might have a circus all summer, at least arrangements have been made with the fair board for room in the barns for 30 to 50 head of horses for a week or so for storage space for wagons and other equipment for a longer time."

"Plans for settling wage claims and a reorganization of the circus was the subject of a conference of Crook, Harvey, Hoffman and Bert Taylor."

"The county fairgrounds lot where the show exhibited on Wednesday, June 1, has been released and if the show should be reorganized it will be done here according to Mr. Harvey. In the event the show does not reorganize some of the equipment will be stored at the fairgrounds until it can be transported to other shows. Mr. Crook said, 'We're not going to sell anything, but we plan to get some money here to pay off the men.'"

"This morning [Friday, June 3] it was reported that pay vouchers were signed by more than 100 laborers who are waiting for their money. An understanding was given these men by their foreman that they would be paid soon, probably today."

"The animals were fed on schedule. The four elephants got about a bale of hay

Cook & Cole one sheet upright title printed by National Printing and Engraving Co. Circus World Museum collection.

lor of the Consolidated Circus Co. and Fred Buchanan of Robbins Bros. Circus the story advised that Taylor had operated the show in 1925 under another name and this year Crook and his associates took it over with Crook putting up a large sum of cash while Harvey and Hoffman were nominal partners and put up no real money. Taylor executed an agreement combining a lease, a chattel mortgage and bill of sale turning over the greater part of the property to Crook who was to operate the show, Taylor taking 25 percent of the profits which didn't pan out to apply on \$22,000 due him. His mortgage was not due yet.

The complication was further explained as follows: "Taylor turned over a few thousand dollars worth of the property to Buchanan in settlement of a former obligation, which lets Buchanan in on the claims."

"The horses and other stock belongs to

apiece and a half a barrel of water. 'High-pockets,' the man in charge of the elephants, said he was 'sitting tight' waiting for orders. None but himself and his helpers are allowed to go near the 'bulls.'

"The lion roared a couple of times when his keeper cleaned his cage and fed him, but the sideboards were kept on the wagon shutting all but his feet from view. The same was true of the hyena, leopard and other animals. Monkeys chattered noisily at their long enforced confinement."

Also it was noted that 26 Shetland ponies, two camels and a buffalo were on emergency rations. A troupe of trained mules also was feeling the pinch of the shortage of funds in reduced feed. Other attachments were levied on the stock by various members of the circus in an effort to make sure that their wages would be forthcoming.

Stories continued relating the hardships of the circus troupe but a spirit of optimism prevailed among most of the group as they gathered in the railway station a few feet from their cars to discuss the situation.

"I reckon we'll all come out all right," Lee Ford, leader of 11 cowboys of the show predicted last night, 'Tain't so bad as it might be—we're eatin' an' we got a roof over our heads, so what more can a man want."

The article concluded quoting some remarks by R. M. Harvey: "Bad weather and bad luck caused the show's failure."

"I guess we had every kind of bad luck, except a cyclone. Why, since we left Omaha on May 21, we have only had three days when it didn't rain. With the farmers busy in the fields, and the rain and cold to stop those who could come, we lost an average of \$1,000 a day. The total loss through the failure will probably be in excess of \$40,000. All local bills in Fairmont have been paid." Harvey explained that the attachments were the result of claims brought by employees of the circus. His final remarks were that they were running a "Sunday school show, with not a short change artist in the whole bunch."

Another front page story told about Lawrence Cowell, 29, the show's tractor driver, who was sick from inflammatory rheumatism and had been confined to his bunk on the train. His plight had been discovered by a *Sentinel* reporter and the man asked that he be given a bed in the city jail and properly cared for. A taxi driver volunteered to take him to city hall and the Mayor provided a cot for him in the jail. He was fed, and given medical attention. Dr. R. C. Hunt said that with the

needed care the man would probably soon be able to travel again. A special fund was set up for his care.

In the meantime plans for a benefit performance for the stranded circus employees were rapidly formulated and by Saturday, June 4, it was all set. Judge J. E. Haycraft served as general chairman of the committee in charge, assisted by E. J.

low Wagon Jinx Did It Claim The Circus; The Old Yellow Ticket Wagon Was the Cause of It All Say Employees." Then the article, after reviewing the situation, added this bit of information: "Superstition is one of the outstanding things of the circus world. The whole blame of the stranding of the show is placed on the yellow ticket wagon, which is regarded as the real jinx."

"The story of the yellow ticket wagon, involves the breaking of two circuses, several minor accidents, which nearly resulted in deaths and many other interesting happenings."

"The wagon was first owned by the Taylor brothers who went out with a show that lasted but five weeks. When the yellow wagon was brought back to Omaha, it caught fire and nearly burned up. New steps were built after the fire."

"When Cook & Cole took the circus out, practically all of the old troupers were afraid of the yellow ticket wagon. At their first stop in Iowa, the wagon was tipped over on the lot while it was being moved by elephants. After this incident, the elephants even became superstitious and would not go near the wagon."

"The wagon has been tipped over three times since, being toppled from a flat car on another stop, this time falling on Leo Crook, one of the owners. He still limps from the accident. In this fall, the wagon almost caused the death of several workers and the owner."

True, there are superstitions in all kinds of show business, much more so in the past than now. Old troupers, as mentioned in this article, love to kid the locals in this manner. Had the reporter been a little more up on the circus, he should have asked the question, "Well, what is it about this particular yellow circus wagon that caused the trouble on the F. J. Taylor and Cook & Cole circus. It didn't do so when Al G. Barnes had it and that show is one of the most successful now on the road, and what about Ringling-Barnum, they've had a yellow ticket wagon for reserve seat sales for years." For sure the subject would have changed fast. It's just like a story which is still being told, and I guess believed by some, the one that the late Merle Evans, famed Ringling-Barnum bandmaster would never play the "Stars and Stripes Forever" unless some disaster was happening. Those of us who can personally remember or have heard the 1955 tape of the Ringling performance, know that story 'tain't so. Maestro Evans did indeed play the Sousa classic as part of the regular music book.

Two articles in the local papers covered

**CIRCUS DAY**  
TWO PERFORMANCES  
**MONDAY AT 2-8 P. M.**  
**The "Big Top" Will Rise Again**

For a Gigantic, Countrywide Benefit For The Circus Employees, Stranded Here Without Means to Get Away to Their Homes Or New Jobs. We Must Do Something For Them.

See the "Big Top" will rise again, and the circus folks will put on a big show, commencing at 2 P. M. It will be the greatest performance of their lives. They will put all their hearts and souls into every act, to give folks their money's worth, and more.

**All Seats Free!**

Put It Over

THE ELEPHANT ACT IS THE EQUAL OF ANY AND BETTER THAN MOST. BE SURE AND SEE IT!

Tell Your Friends

**AN UNSURPASSED TWO HOUR PERFORMANCE**

J. E. HAYCRAFT      E. J. EDWARDS      Local Committee      H. E. WADE      C. F. GAARENSTROOM      A. M. NELSON

THIS IS CONTRASTED BY JUDGEMENT FORBIDING IT.

June 4 - 1927

Newspaper advertisement for the Cook & Cole benefit performances at Fairmont, Minnesota, June 6, 1927. Martin County Historical Society.

Edwards, C. F. Gaarenstroon and A. M. Nelson. It had been hoped to get the big top set up and hold two performances at the fairground lot at 4 and 8 p.m. on Sunday, June 5, but Minnesota prohibited such shows on Sunday so the benefit performances were delayed until Monday, June 6. All acts would be put on by the show's performers, most of the feature acts still remain in Fairmont.

The train was unloaded and such property as needed sent to the Fairmont grounds lot and setup was made. The committee decided that one dollar admission be charged and began immediately to promote ticket sales. A large advertisement was placed in the town's newspapers giving details about the planned benefit. Everything was set in order for two performances on June 6. There was widespread coverage of the show's failure and efforts of the local townsmen to give a helping hand. The Associated Press wire service picked up the story and a Fairmont resident displayed a copy of the Los Angeles Times with the circus story on the front page latest developments with Cook & Cole. Headlines were "Yel-

the benefit with the first being written after the matinee and before the evening show. It noted that 500 were at the first show and it was hoped a capacity crowd would be on hand at night. Local businessmen handled all the money, sold the tickets and were in complete charge, everything except the performance which was put on by Cook & Cole personnel.

An interesting development was that the "jinxed" yellow ticket wagon was pulled downtown at the busiest corner of the city and sold tickets to the benefit performances. "Mayor Nelson presided at the ticket wagon at the Beulke corner. If anybody got by him it was because they ducked around behind. Judge Haycraft started the ticket buying by purchasing four tickets, which he gave away, as he personally had to go out of town." The entire benefit committee zealously promoted the ticket sale evidently in the same fashion as present day civic and fraternal club members of shows they sponsor. The article was filled with the names of tickets purchased by prominent citizens in Fairmont.

Pre-matinee activities downtown included a band concert by members of the show band plus 3 or 4 local musicians, and the four elephants paraded the city streets.

The first performance was given a hearty rave review with the reporter noting the marvelous elephant act was worth the \$1 admission alone. Also high praise was given the riding act and trapeze numbers.

The article closed by advising that one adult ticket would admit two children to the final performance.

Several figures on the amount of money raised were published. Some accounts put it as high as \$1,200 but most were lower, around \$800 plus.

The *Martin County Sentinel* in its June 7 edition carried an account headed, "Show Workers Stage Exodus From Fairmount, Few Get Employment Here and Others are Looking for Jobs. The article said that "relief fund of \$820 resulted from the two benefit circus performances and today the stranded employees were paid 25 percent of their wage claims. The paying was done at the Strand Theater box office. Mr. Nicholas and his force donating their time and equipment in computing the sums payable and handling each man and woman the exact change. All the people had only been on the payroll about ten days and none had very large amounts

due. Several who had just joined up only drew a dollar and a half and few got as much as \$20.

It was anticipated that a few people would show up whose names did not appear on the Treasurer's books. About one percent of the fund was reserved for additional claims, and sure enough it was needed. For one thing they had forgotten the side show band--four black musicians--so the small reserve was needed.



Joe Hodgini and his riding act around 1927. He had only four people in his act on Cook & Cole. Pfening Archives.

Nearly the whole forenoon was taken for the pay off. The circus workers, who received every penny of the receipts from the two performances, were profusely grateful to the people of Fairmont. They asked that the newspapers express their gratitude for the many kindnesses received.

"No other place in the country would have done what Fairmont has done," many of them declared. "We'll surely never forget Fairmont. Wish we could live here."

The article said that shortly after the pay off the circus employees began to meld away, a few went to promised jobs in the area, but most soon caught the

trains to new positions elsewhere. Nearly all hoped to land a job with another show. It was mentioned that the evening performance drew about the same attendance as did the matinee, indicating that about a thousand saw the two shows.

In addition to the benefit funds the city had come up with around \$500 in cash or its equivalent to feed the stranded folks for six days. After breakfast on the morning following the benefit the show cook

took down his equipment along side the Northwestern tracks. It was noted that after the evening show the help had worked far into the night loading the big top and other properties back onto the train.

Local people praised the final show saying there wasn't a word or a look to indicate the circus was singing its swan song. Fellow performers said that Joe Hodgini gave his best exhibition since joining the show.

The article concluded by stating there still was no indication when the circus property would be moved.

During an interview in January, 1990 in Sarasota, Joe Hodgini told the author that following the two benefit performances in Fairmont he left to join the Robbins Bros. Circus for the rest of the season.

There was a short piece in the June 10 newspaper which reported that Frank P. Meister, Cook & Cole

band leader, together with a number of the players in the band, left for Dover, Ohio, that evening, where Meister had contracted to furnish a band for the Evans Dog and Pony Show.

"In behalf of the members of the band, I want to thank the bands men of Fairmont, the people of this city, and the community in general for their assistance, kindness and favors shown the show folks," said Meister.

"I have been in the show business for thirty-five years and except to remain in it to the last, and I never saw such wholehearted generosity and kindness to strangers in adversity.

"You may not realize it, but the name 'Fairmont' will be mentioned many times by show people the country over for years to come. We will never forget the goodwill and help in time of need shown us by your citizens."

In the Circus World Museum files are two interesting pieces from the St. Peter, (Minnesota) *Herald* where Cook & Cole had been scheduled to play on June 9. The first, dated June 1, told of the show's planned visit, arrival of the advance car, and listed some of the attractions in the performance which would be seen. It was noted the Fairgrounds lot would be used with plenty of room for visitor's cars to be parked. The show's agent on the advance car which arrived on May 31--ten days ahead was identified as A. T. Van Nyssen.

The other article dated June 8 was headlined, "No Circus Tomorrow, Cook & Cole Busted. Show Booked at Fair Grounds Goes Broke at Fairmont Last Week." The story told of the sad finish of the show at Fairmont on June 1, part of it read, "St. Peter citizens who have gazed longingly at the big lithographs, prominent on every old building in the community, will now do so with regret for the opportunity to see a good, clean little circus has gone glimmering. Because St. Peter has a circus of its own on the road Zellmar Bros., owned by George Engresser--which incidently is sweeping westward on a wave of unsurpassed prosperity in the history of the show--the story of the breakup will be of interest."

This latter article written entirely by locals is interesting in that it mentions the town was well billed, with large lithos in evidence. This would seem to contradict some sources which indicated the show's funds were so depleted that little was left for advance publicity.

It is not known how far ahead Cook & Cole was billed following Fairmont but date sheets are available showing they were printed at least as far ahead as June 18. There was never any mention of claims against the show by National and Srandard the two printing houses which furnished the billing, so in all probability those bills were paid. In any event the route was so short the total amount could not have been too much as lithos and date sheets were very reasonably priced in those days.

The Fairmont newspapers of June 17 carried a notice that Robbins Bros. Circus would play the city on July 6. In the article J. R. Hervey, the Robbins advance advertising and booking agent, who was in town placing advertising and making other arrangements, was said to have done one thing the ill fated Cook & Cole Circus failed to do--named the admission prices. Admission to the big top was to be

75 cents, he said, and 75 cents additional for reserved seats. Hervey took a swipe at Cook & Cole by saying: "There will be no 'usher charge' like the Cook & Cole grafter worked on the public. We aren't afraid of the jinx," he said. "That one show hasn't got a good reputation is no sign another can't have and we're mighty proud of our name."

Robbins Bros. played Fairmont as scheduled and while there picked up the two stock cars belonging to it plus the horses and other stock housed at the fairgrounds.



Warren Brodt, Fairmont, Minnesota, standing beside the under carriage, running gear and wheels of a former Cook & Cole baggage wagon. This photo was taken in 1972. Joe Rettinger collection.

In the meantime, possibly before the Robbins date, three rail cars belonging to F. J. Taylor departed Fairmont for South Omaha. We have no information on the type of cars but probably they consisted of the other two stock cars and a coach. Other Taylor property, mainly baggage wagons loaded with the big top and other equipment remained in Fairmont for a while but later were shipped to South Omaha. The exact date of the shipment is not known but probably not until early or mid 1928. Clarence C. Day remembers seeing the Cook & Cole equipment back at Taylor quarters and recalls the rail cars were painted yellow, same color as the 1925 Taylor Circus cars. In November 1928 ads appeared in *The Billboard* offering for sale circus property by the Consolidated Circus Co. Some ads read: "Ten car Circus for sale, offering it for cash or terms or would exchange for good farm or income property."

The ads continued into 1929 listing various size tents, a baggage car, 55 foot long with wooden underframe, 2 coaches, 60 foot and 58 foot wooden under frame, a

60 foot flat car, and other items of equipment. It was stated complete property for a 10 car show available would be sold as a unit or piece meal. A complete inventory would be sent to those requesting same. Clarence Day had such an inventory and made it available to the author. A total of 11 baggage wagons and 8 cages were listed. Rail cars consisted of 3 flats, 1 advance, 1 sleeper, 1 coach. A total of 11 horses were on the list, including menage, high jumping, saddle, baggage, and a trick mule. No cage type animals or lead stock variety appeared.

The 3 car Taylor show, gilly type, began playing fairs, possibly as early as the fall of 1927 and continued on until 1930. The show was titled Taylor Bros. Circus and was managed by Bert Taylor. Clarence Day says the unit was converted in 1931 to trucks, one being an air calliope mounted on a small motor vehicle. The fair route continued on until 1934 when the unit was discontinued altogether.

For years following 1927 it was rumored that some wagons never made it back to Taylor's South Omaha quarters but remained in Fairmont. In 1950 when the author was preparing a general listing of all old circus wagons still in existence in the United States several advised to check both the Fairmont and South Omaha area for possible wagons as for years there were some there. I wrote many a letter in this regard but could get no definite details of what might be there. A few years later, in the mid 1950s, the late Richard E. Conover, a leading wagon historian of his day, discovered in the Hertzberg circus collection in San Antonio, Texas, one of the two photos showing a line of Cook & Cole wagons in a field--the shot taken full side view picturing the last five wagons. (Both photos show a total of nine wagons.) There was no identification other than the title showing on a baggage wagon, no date nor location. Since it was obvious some wagons had been unloaded we felt maybe these wagons were abandoned. All the various wagon "experts" decided the locale had to be Fairmont. But what was so confusing was that on the Consolidated Circus Co. property list [after Cook & Cole 1927] was both a ticket wagon and a candy [concession] wagon which was the former Forepaugh-Ringling-Gollmar two tier tableau. This should indicate that later both of these wagons went back to South Omaha. The possibility exists that different wagons on the list were designated "ticket" wagon

and "candy" wagon but that is unlikely as these two vehicles were those Taylor had used for those purposes in 1925 and Cook & Cole in 1927.

Still the rumors persisted that wagons were still in Fairmont and when I began my research for the first Taylor (Cook & Cole) article in the early 1960s Bill Johnson made a trip to Fairmont but could find little. He checked the newspaper files and courthouse records but found nothing new, but indeed "Old Timers" did tell him wagons were still in the area but again nothing definite.

It wasn't until sometime in the 1970s when we found definite proof that indeed, as long rumored, there were wagons left in Fairmont. Claude N. Swanson, a contributing editor for a local newspaper, wrote an article remembering the Cook & Cole debacle, a copy of which is in the Circus World Museum files. The article retold the story of the show's finish in Fairmont and some events that occurred later. It mentioned that George Meschke, a rural Welcome farmer, bought a Shetland pony out of the circus herd for his children and also that the Fairmont Canning Company [now a Stokely Van Camp plant] purchased several of the circus wagons, especially for the heavy running gear. The wagons were converted for hauling, corn, peas and other cannery products.

At the present time local Fairmont resident, Warren Brodts, has the chassis, gears and wheels of three of these wagons.

Recently Joe Rettinger received a letter from LaVerne Schultz, president of the Martin County Historical Society located in Fairmont, parts of which read as follows: "I can shed some light on the Cook & Cole Circus. I moved to Fairmont from neighboring Truman in 1928 and I very well remember the abandoned circus wagons. I used to play in and around them with other kids.

"They stood in line along a fence bordering the race track of the old Martin County Fairgrounds at Fairmont. On one of your pictures you mentioned a large brick three story building. That was the old Al Ward orphanage—at the time empty. The building still stands and has had several uses since that time—it is currently the Fairlakes Apartments. The site of the wagons was the south west corner of the fairgrounds, at that time quite a distance from any city buildings.

"After World War II I went to work for the Fairmont Canning Co.. They had at least two of the circus wagon chassis. They had built large screened in framed boxes and mounted them on the chassis and they were used as waste paper wagons. I remember the construction was much heavier than the many other wag-

**COOK & COLE'S  
GIGANTIC 3 RING  
CIRCUS**

**SATURDAY  
JUNE**

**PERFORMANCES 2 & 8 P. M.  
PARADE 11 A. M.**

**18**

Cook & Cole Circus date sheet, season of 1927. It was never used as the show closed on June 1. Circus World Museum collection.

ons the company had, used for holding sweet corn. I do not know how the company acquired them or when and that company has changed hands three times since then and all or nearly all of the old timers that would remember are long gone." Mr. Schultz promised to continue the search for additional information.

The wagons acquired by the Cannery were most certainly to have been the three or four new ones built by Crook at the Taylor quarters just prior to the season's opener, the vehicles Clarence Day described as being flat bed with skeleton posts.

Even though some of the mystery of the Fairmont wagons is cleared up there still remains the question of the final disposition of the nine wagons left at the fairgrounds. Since they appear to be empty, no canvas, seats, props, and could have been sitting for about a year at the time the photos were made, the possibility exists that they never returned to South Omaha. Could some of them still be in the Fairmont area?

Moving back to the Taylor quarters in South Omaha there was never an account in *The Billboard* of what advertised property may have been sold nor to whom. Again, it was rumored for years that some wagons were stored there. Part of this mystery was cleared up in one of the

most remarkable wagon finds ever. In 1961 Chappie Fox, then director of the Circus World Museum, got on the trail of the long rumored Taylor-Cook & Cole wagons in the Omaha area. Working closely with Tom Parkinson, then CHS vice president, and Floyd Henton, director of the Riverside Park Zoo in Omaha they contacted Mrs. E. G. Larson, a daughter of F. J. Taylor, Jr. Sure enough the no. 1 bandwagon which had served both on the 1925 Taylor circus and 1927 Cook & Cole was still stored in a shed at the old farm in South Omaha. Mrs. Larson graciously donated the wagon to the Circus World Museum. It was completely restored by Ernie Zimmerly and the museum staff and today is one of that institution's collection of historic circus wagons. When the wagon arrived in Barboo there was found stored inside a number of old date and title sheets of the Taylor and

Cook & Cole shows. There were three styles of Taylor dates with titles of F. J. Taylor's Circus, F. J. Taylor Jr. Circus and Taylor Bros. Circus. The Cook & Cole date and title sheets are shown here.

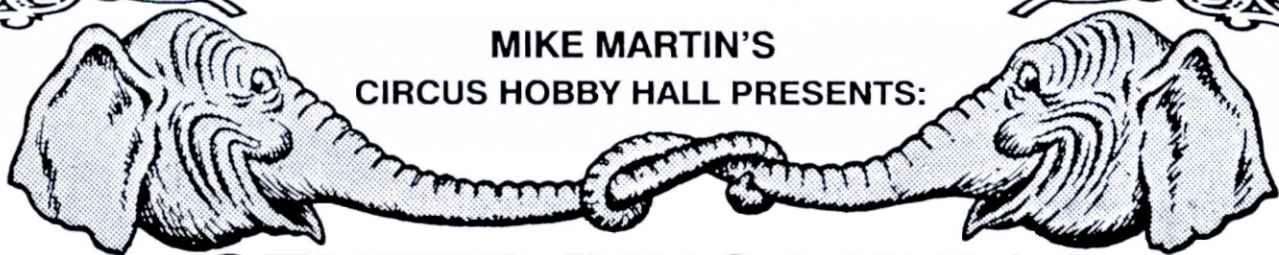
When Chappie Fox and his associates went to pick up the bandwagon they noted old pieces of ironwork from wagons embedded in the earth in a grassy field near the shed where the wagon was stored. This indicates that quite a few wagons evidently just disintegrated into the ground.

The question still remains about a steam calliope being part of the Taylor equipment. Clarence Day said he felt sure it was sold to someone and although it is fairly certain it never appeared on another circus it could have gone to some carnival or some other type show, or park, or to an individual.

For assistance in the preparation of this article we would like to sincerely thank CHS Director Joseph S. Rettinger, CHS Vice-President Fred Dahlinger, Buckles Woodcock, the Martin County Historical Society, Fairmont, Minnesota, and the Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Research is a continuing process with members of the Circus Historical Society and if at any time anyone can provide additional information, and, or photos or any kind of illustration, please contact the editor of the *Bandwagon*. Such material will be used later for a Cook & Cole supplement.

MIKE MARTIN'S  
CIRCUS HOBBY HALL PRESENTS:



## CENTER RING VIDEOS

### RINGLING/BARNUM VOL 1 - 30's, 40's, 50's

\$25<sup>00</sup>  
P.P.

COLOR  
AND  
B & W

- ENJOY 2 HOURS OF REAL CIRCUS NOSTALGIA, RELIVING THOSE GLORIOUS DAYS WITH THE "BIGGEST OF THE BIG TOPS!"
- YOU'LL SEE IT ALL, FROM THE TRAIN UNLOADING, THE RUN TO THE LOT, STAKES DRIVEN, POLES AND CANVAS RAISED SKYWARD. VISIT THE MENAGERIE AND SIDE SHOW, BACKYARD, THE PERFORMANCE AND MUCH, MUCH MORE.
- PLUS, SEE ALL THE EXCITEMENT WHEN THE "BIG ONE PLAYED THE GARDEN"! GORGEOUS COLOR FILM OF BACKSTAGE AND PERFORMANCE. AND FINALLY, SEE BEHIND THE SCENES AND REHEARSALS AT THE OLD SARASOTA WINTER QUARTERS.
- IF YOU WERE "WITH IT" BACK THEN, OR HAVE ALWAYS WONDERED WHAT IT WAS REALLY LIKE, THEN TAKE THIS VISIT TO "THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH"!

### "CIRCUS NOSTALGIA # 3"

# SEE:

2 FULL  
HOURS

\$25<sup>00</sup>  
P.P.

COLOR  
AND  
B & W

- TOM MIX CIRCUS 30's
- DOWNIE BROS. CIRCUS 30's
- BARNETT BROS. CIRCUS 30's
- HAGEN BROS. CIRCUS 50's
- BARNES/SELLS-FLOTO 30's
- CRISTIANI BROS. CIRCUS 50's
- PLUS MUCH, MUCH MORE!

- 10 PG CATALOG, LOADED WITH MATERIALS FOR ANY COLLECTOR, SENT WITH ALL ORDERS ●

## CIRCUS HOBBY HALL

11950 107TH AVE. N., LARGO, FL 34648

**J**erry Mugivan and Bert Bowers, owners of the John Robinson and Howes Great London circuses, purchased the Carl Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus at bankruptcy auction on December 28, 1918 for \$36,100. The sale was conducted in French Lick, Indiana, just a few miles from the Hagenbeck winters quarters in West Baden. The circus had been in receivership following the close of the 1918 season. The quarters property was not included in the purchase and remained the property of Ed Ballard, the former owner. Ballard became associated with the new owners and quickly agreed to a lease on the West Baden quarters. A few years later Ballard as banker for the trio became an equal partner in the operations of Mugivan and Bowers.

The Ballard property added twenty-five flat cars, twelve stock cars, eight sleepers, two advance cars, a private car and a storage car to the Mugivan and Bower's holdings. They acquired ten elephants, six camels, five zebras, a large number of horses and a number of caged animals. The wagons consisted of twenty-one cages, nine tableaux and band wagons and two 48 H.P. Knox tractors. The vehicles totaled 102, enough for a large show. While no baggage horses were listed in the property acquired by Mugivan and Bowers they did get 220 sets of baggage harness. The \$36,100 they paid for all of this was clearly a bargain.

Nothing further appeared in the *Billboard* until the January 25 issue when two large want ads appeared. The first was for the advance. The show needed people for practically every position, managers for two advertising cars, press agents, contracting agents, billposters, bannermen, lithographers, cooks (white or

# Carl HAGENBECK WALLACE CIRCUS

## Season of 1919

By Gordon M. Carver

black), programmers, checkers, route riders and mail agents. The ad stated that the show had signed a union contract and would pay union scale wages. Inquiries were to be addressed to Ed C. Krupp, general agent, West Baden, Indiana. Response to the ad led to the hiring of Charles Phinney as contracting agent, Frank O'Donnell as general press representative and eventually J. C. Donahue as manager of advance car number one and Fred Bates as number two car manager.

The second ad was for side show and novelty act personnel. The show wanted unusual performers, sensational exhibitions, freaks, strange people, human prodigies, a snake charmer with distinctive act, black band leader, black musicians and performers for a minstrel show, oriental dancers and musicians. Also needed were lecturers, ticket sellers and announcers. Nothing but the best wardrobe and stage settings would be accepted. Applications for the side show jobs were to be sent to side show man-

The Carl Hagenbeck Lion tableau in a 1919 parade. The wagon is followed by the show's ten elephants. Author's collection.

ager Arthur Hoffman in Washington, D.C.

Two weeks later another ad appeared for musicians and a calliope player to double in the band. Musicians were to write to bandmaster Billie Robbins in El Paso, Texas.

The following week Hagenbeck-Wallace advertised for performers for the big show with nearly every conceivable type of act being listed. Also needed were tractor drivers, blacksmiths, woodworkers, mechanics, canvasesmen, seat men, property men, wardrobe peo-

ple, animal men, chandelier men, cooks, butchers, waiters, polers, chalkers, four, six and eight horse drivers, car porters and lunch counter men for the privilege car.

The response to these ads filled the show's needs as no further ads were published until a week after the show's opening. The May 3 *Billboard* carried a short want ad for riders with stock, aerial acts, clowns and "any other high class act." This ad suggests that there may have been some last minute disappointments or failure of acts previously signed to appear. The circus business was back strong and flourishing after the war and there were a number of new shows on the road competing for competent people.

On June 7 the show again advertised for performers and clowns and for side show personnel.

The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus opened in West Baden, Indiana with a dress rehearsal at the winter quarters on April 26. A 153 mile Sunday run took the show to Cincinnati, Ohio where it played the usual two locations, Cumminsville and Norwood, April 28-29.

The performance was adequate, but not as strong as in prior years. Charley Roo-





Bert Bowers, manager and co-owner of the Carl Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. Pfening Archives.

ney and his riding act were back as were the Cottrells and Gene and Mary Enos. Emil Schweyer continued handling the wild animals. The Flying Wards were not with the show for the first time in a number of years and in fact no flying trapeze act appeared in the show.

The rest of the opening week was spent in Middletown, Dayton, Columbus and Portsmouth. All of these cities were relatively short distances of 24, 21 and 65 miles except the run to Portsmouth which was 100 miles. At both Dayton and Columbus Sells-Floto followed Hagenbeck by only four days. This was the closest these two shows came to each other during the season. In fact Hagenbeck-Wallace was able to stay away from other large shows for almost the entire year.

The next week started with two stands in West Virginia at Huntington and Charleston. The show picked up two more dates in Athens and Zanesville, Ohio and was contracted to play Washington, Pennsylvania on April 10, but this stand was cancelled due to the lot being under water.

In 1919 the show was considerably reduced in size from what it had been in the preceding years. From forty-nine cars—25 flats, 12 stocks, 2 supply cars, 9 sleepers and 2 advance cars—the train was cut to 14 flats, 7 stocks, 7 sleepers and 2 advance cars for a total of 30 cars. The flats and stocks were

sixty foot wooden truss rod cars. The show did not acquire 72 foot Mt. Vernon cars until the next year.

The number one advance advertising car had a crew of twenty men excluding the cook and paste maker. Beside the car manager, boss billposter and boss lithographer there were seven billposters, three lithographers, five banner tackers, a daub squarer and a banner salesman. The later sold local advertising banners that hung in the big top and menagerie tent.

The staff of the show was headed by manager and co-owner Bert Bowers. Harry Farig was treasurer; Lou Thilman, purchasing agent; Dixie Van Valkenburgh, press agent with show; Capt. Bill Curtis, lot superintendent; George Stumpf, boss hostler; Shanty Webber, chandelier man; George Brown, trainmaster; William Emery, boss elephant man; Charles Davis, cook house superintendent and George Davis, concession boss. During the season Norman Barnes replaced William Emery as elephant boss.

The third week of the season opened in Erie, Pennsylvania on May 12, followed by Meadville, Butler, Charleroi, Uniontown and McKeesport. Meadville was lost because the ground was too wet for the show to get on the lot.

The fourth week took the show back into Ohio. On May 28 the show was in Toledo. Newspaper publicity in the *Toledo Blade* provides an interesting side light on how a circus of thirty cars could "puff" itself. First was a description of the train, "87 double length cars" which carried 1,000 people, 858 horses and twenty-two tents which when erected covered 14 acres of ground. Also listed on the show were, "a special post office, lighting plant and hotel accommodations for feeding 4,000 meals daily." The parade equipment was said to represent an ex-

The only new wagon on the show was the steam calliope. Pfening Archives.

penditure of \$1,000,000. It was all new and "not like any other circus parades of the past." There were to be floats of burnished gold made by oriental workmen, costumes and tapestries from France and Persia, banners from China, statuary from Italy, band and orchestra wagons of bronze, hand carved and decorated with pure burnished gold. Almost every type of man was to be seen in native dress and characteristic music of the world was to be represented by "trumpeting brass bands, chanters, bag pipers, tom-tom players and drum beaters."

If the parade lived up to this advance billing it certainly was a parade to end all parades. However there were indeed a number of fine tableaux and band wagons in the procession, including many that had been built for the Carl Hagenbeck show in 1905.

The *Toledo Blade* published an after notice stating: "Circus Pleases Large Crowd; few Complain. It was a typical circus—that Hagenbeck-Wallace show in Toledo Wednesday afternoon and evening.

"Here and there a few chronic complaints were scattered through the plank seat sections, but in the main, nearly everybody was enthusiastic and satisfied.

"When Mr. Toledoan and his family go to a circus they expect such annoyances as an extra charge for reserve seats, 15 cent ice cream cones, and announcements that 'this is positively the last time around with tickets for the big wild west show, immediately after the regular performance.'

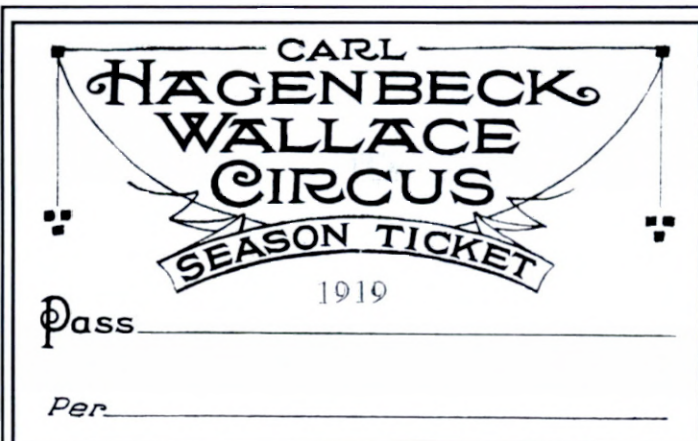
"There was hardly room enough for the crowds at the evening show. Many persons sat on the grass."

The show was in Detroit, Michigan on May 29 and 30. As in Cincinnati it played two lots, only eight miles apart. It seems strange that the show would be torn down and set up again at locations so close together. This may have been done

since most circus patrons arrived by street car and these two locations provided access from different parts of the city.

The circus train was, according to the *Billboard*, all new. This was, of course, not true. All of the cars came from the Ballard show and had been used for several years. They did have a new coat of paint, dark orange with brown trimming, with white and gold lettering. This was a rather un-





Season pass issued by the Carl Hagenbeck-Wallace show in 1919. A note on the back read: "The acceptor agrees to make use of this pass at every possible opportunity, also to demand the best with the show, and to register a complaint if not obtained, and to feel that they are the most welcomed visitors to the show, because of their being personal friends of the Carl Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus." Pfening Archives.

usual color scheme for a circus train but was very striking.

By June 9 the show was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin for a two day stand. The show was in Eau Claire on June 13 where the local paper gave it an extensive show day review. Much of the story was from a press agent handout, but a few observations were incorporated following a reporter's visit to the lot in the morning. Part of the article read: "The Carl Hagenbeck-Wallace circus, with its one-mile train and fourteen acres of tents arrived this morning from Stevens Point.

"The street pageant this noon aroused considerable attention and was attended with all the eclat that accompanies a gala circus parade. The horses and wagons, with handsome men and women, and bands galore, made a favorable impression. There were two calliopes and an endless procession of parade and animal wagons.

"At the grounds this afternoon the reputation of the Carl Hagenbeck-Wallace was lived up to when the voluminous program was introduced. The Carl Hagenbeck menagerie has been famous for years, and this year it is well sustained by the collection of wild animals of every specie. Captain Emil Schwyer, the noted Swiss animal trainer, who finished a years engagement at the New York Hippodrome, presented a wonderful trained animal act consisting of lions, tigers and leopards, while in another ring Mme. Donovan and her trained elephants performed in two rings simultaneously. [This was pure bunk as Schwyer had been with the show for many years and Ova Donovan was not with the show in 1919.]

"The celebrated Morales family performed by the teeth, head and hands on

and Mlle. Clark. The Rooney's do double somersaults on horseback with the ease and grace of the best trained experts.

"The hippodrome events, on the special half mile track, are a special feature, introducing Miss Gladys Gorman, the well known society equestrienne in her special diving act, introducing 'Admiral Sims' her high school horse.

"Walter Hill and his cowboys and cowgirls do a number of interesting tricks with the lariat, showing the dancing horses, the world's best hurdling and running ponies, and a lot of other things equally as interesting.

"Eddie Delevan, of Baraboo, Wisconsin, who has charge of the front of the house, as they call it in circus parlance, gave a breakfast this morning at the Galloway House to the business staff of the circus.

"Two of the circus tractors broke down here and they had to use outside help to get the wagons to the grounds."

On June 14 Hagenbeck was in Red Wing, Minnesota. Minneapolis was played on June 16-17. Business in Wisconsin and Minnesota was reported as mixed.

The route then took the show into Iowa. A new big top arrived in Des Moines on June 22 and was erected there for the first time. According to the *Billboard* the big top's appearance was "bizarre." No explanation of what made it bizarre was given. The center ring Rooney bareback act left in Des Moines for their fair dates. The Costello troupe which had been in the end rings moved to the center ring. Norman Barnes also took over as elephant boss there. It was reported that all of the Iowa stands had given good business.

June ended in Omaha and July started

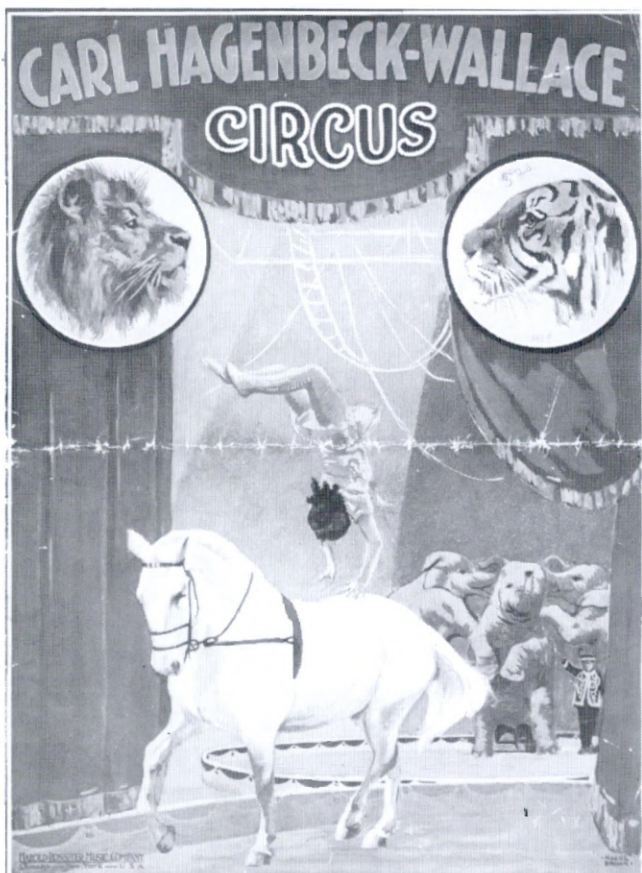
the sliding wire, while the Avallons were doing all kinds of different feats, including the introduction of Anna Avallon, the only girl that does a double somersault on the rebounding wire. The Enos on the revolving ball and fifty other wizards of supreme merit performed for the edification of the public.

"Don't fail to pay strict attention to the riding acts, of which there are a score, including such famous riders as the Rooneys, the Ryans, Melrose and Meers

in Lincoln followed by York and Beatrice, a matinee-only stop. On July 7 the show was in Lawrence, Kansas. While business in Kansas continued good other problems arose. Kansas farmers with good crops and a shortage of help were paying \$8 to \$10 a day, a very high wage for labor at the time. As a result many circus hands left the show, but for the most part they did not stay away long. In Omaha the city officials were generally opposed to circuses and made things difficult for the show.

The side show was fronted by fourteen new double decked banners, a bally stand and two ticket boxes, occupied by Cal

Herald used by the Carl Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus in 1919. Pfening Archives.



The 1919 Carl Hagenbeck-Wallace program was actually a songster published by the Harold Rossiter Music Co. The performance listing was interspersed between sheet music and advertising. Pfening Archives.

Towers and Lou Delmore who was later a side show manager for some of the larger shows. The side show was presented in the same top that had been used in 1918, a 72 foot round with two 40s still in good condition. Arthur Hoffman was manager with a lineup of variety and vaudeville type attractions. He had no "obnoxious freaks" or unattractive exhibits. The attractions were Brad and Anita, novelty gun act with bird and monkey features; Jack Neadow, blind bag puncher; Professor Jackson, jazz-minstrel band with fifteen musicians, comedians, singers and dancers; Mina Silva, snake enchantress with five huge snakes; Hathia Fengetly and wife, Hindu magician featuring East Indian torture boards; Signer Arcaris and daughter, clever sword manipulation and impalement; and three other platform acts

that were not listed in a review. In addition there were four "Oriental" dancers and their musicians in a walled off end of the top "for men only." One of the dancers was Babe Delmore, wife of the ticket seller.

The last stand in Kansas, at Dodge City on July 12, was preparatory to a long Sunday run of 265 miles to Pueblo, Colorado. The show was in Denver on July 17-18. Denver, the winter home of the Sells-Floto Circus, provided capacity business at all four performances. Author Courtney Riley Cooper visited the show there.

After Fort Collins on July 24 the show made a 140 mile jump to Wheatly, Wyoming for a matinee-only date. With a temperature of 110 degrees and increased prices in Wheatly, the single show brought capacity business. The show then made a 127 mile jump through mountains to Casper for another afternoon only stand. Following a 134 mile run the show played its first Sunday stand in Thermopolis on July 27.

The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus moved into Montana at Billings on July 28 and played four more stands in that state. Missouri was lost on August 2 because

The steam calliope in a 1919 Hagenbeck-Wallace parade in Beatrice, Nebraska. Circus World Museum collection.



a railroad bridge was out due to heavy rains.

To start the second half of the season the show moved into the far west with a 257 mile Sunday run to Spokane, Washington. Moscow, Idaho was played on August 6 before going back into Washington at Walla Walla. These were long overnight jumps of about 150 miles. Portland, Oregon was played on August 11 and 12 after a short run of 87 miles on a Sunday.

Hagenbeck-Wallace went into Canada for a two day stand in Vancouver on August 18 and 19. It was in Seattle on August 21 and 22.

Bill Woodcock, Sr. visited the show in Seattle and made the following notes: "The Wallace show made a two day stand in Seattle in August 1919. That was the first season Bert Bowers managed the show, and it impressed me as being considerably lighter than it was for the many seasons that ensued. The show had 28 cars back and 2 ahead. A wooden train.

"The No. 1 bandwagon in 1919 was a tableau that latter day circus enthusiasts have labeled 'Lion & Snake.' I have noticed that many model builders have an idea that all old time circus parade wagons had a name, same as ships and Pullman cars. I am often asked what so and so and such and such a wagon was called. A number of vehicles used in the old time circus street processions were built to represent a nation or continent or some famous legend or fairy tale. Some had the name carved or painted on them. Circus bill writers made much ado over the parade equipment and used some very glamorous and romantic names in describing the parade rolling stock with their show, but as far as I can learn from old time troupers, and calling on my own experience, the people back with a show always referred to wagons by number or by the load they carried, such as trunk wagon, candy wagon, trapping wagon, Chandelier wagon, and so on.

"In recent years the boys interested in parade wagons have invented a lot of names such as 'Lion & Mirror,' 'Two Jesters,' 'Five Graces' and the like."

Woodcock recorded the following parade lineup:

Two men, mounted flags.

Bugle corps, 4 men, mounted in red uniforms.

Bandwagon, 8 horses, band in red uniforms.

3 Ladies, mounted.

Cage, red and silver, 3 lions, 6 horses.

Cage, white and gold, 4 horses.

Cage, red and yellow, 2 polar bears, 4 horses.

Cage, purple and red, 2 ostriches and 1 llama, 4 horses.

Bandwagon, white and gold, clown band, 8 horses.

5 Men, mounted.

Cage, green and gold, 3 lions, 6 horses.

Cage, red and gold, 2 leopards and 1 puma, 4 horses.

Cage, blue and gold, 6 horses.

Air calliope, orange and gold, 4 hybrid zebras.

6 Ladies, mounted.

Cage, yellow, 4 horses.

Bandwagon, cream, band in red uniforms, 8 horses.

6 Men, mounted.

Cage, blue and silver, 1 tiger, 2 horses.

Cage, green and gold, hippopotamus, 8 horses.

6 Men, mounted.

Bandwagon, white and gold, colored band in red uniforms, 8 horses.

Wild west section with ten people.

Beauty tableau, green and gold, 6 horses.

Cage, red and white, 2 pumas, 2 horses.

10 elephants.

5 camels.

Steam calliope, red and gold, 8 horses.

The steam calliope was built for the 1919 season and was the only new wagon on the show that year.

This was a substantial parade with five tableau-band wagons, eleven cages, ninety-six draft horses, thirty-eight mounted people and horses including the wild west people. There were four bands and two calliopes. It is noteworthy that there were two cages pulled by only two horses. It is not known if the show was short of horses or if these were short cross cages. It is interesting to note that the show was using only a small part, less than half, of what was acquired from the 1918 show, 15 parade wagons and 21 cages.

The three ring performance, we believe, was presented under a four pole big top. However at the opening in Cincinnati the *Billboard* stated that the show was using the 1918 top—a six polor—but with only five poles. This suggests four rings or perhaps three rings and a stage. In spite of this the printed program lists acts in three rings.

The program was as follows:

Display 1. Opening spec under the direction of Bud Gorman.



A Hagenbeck-Wallace side show opening during the 1919 season. Pfening Archives.

Display 2. Statue acts in end rings with three girls each, ring one Misses Malone, LaTell and White, ring three Miss Bell and Leach sisters.

Display 3. Emil Schwyer in the arena working a tiger riding an elephant, walking on pedestals and closing with a jump through a fire hoop.

Display 4. Four small elephants worked in ring one by William Emery and four big elephants in ring three worked by John Fuller. They finished with a "cooch" dance on the hippodrome track.

Display 5. Emil Schwyer presented a lion riding a horse.

Display 6. A Japanese family presented tight wire slides from the top of the tent to the ground, a hair slide by a little girl, an iron jaw slide by another girl and a foot slide by a third girl.

Forty-two horses hitched to a baggage wagon in 1919. Charlie Rooney is on horseback in front. Circus World Museum collection.



Display 7. Emil Schwyer presented a group of six lions.

Concert announcement with cowboys and cowgirls appearing on track with Bert Cole announcing the wild west after-show.

Display 8. A melange of high perch and aerial acts. Ring one, Gene and Mary Enos, perch. Ring three Freehand and Ceromove, perch. Over the track Miss Ryan, swinging ladder; Miss LeRoy, flying rings; Miss

White, single trapeze and the Morales Sisters, swinging ladders.

Display 9. Ring one, Miss Malone and Mr. Lindsey, contortion. Ring two, Mr. Goodwin, frog contortion. Ring three, the Cranes in a barrel jumping act.

Display 10. Bareback riding. Ring one, Miss Meers. Ring two, Charles Rooney. Ring three, Miss Hodgini.

Display 11. Clown band in the center ring.

Display 12. Low wire acts. Ring one the LeRoy troupe. Ring two, the Avalons. Ring three, the LaTells. On the track clowns with a dog and ball.

Display 13. Miss Cottrell in the center ring with a trick pony. Ring one, LaBell Clark high school and dove act. Ring three, John Fuller with equine tricks.

Display 14. Ring one, Billy Waite boomerang throwing. Ring two, Max Freeland performing hand balancing. Ring three, the Morales trampoline casting act.

Display 15. Manege acts in three rings with Miss White, Charles Rooney, John Fuller, Rita Bell, Mr. Ledoun, Miss Malone. On the track Gladys Gorman presented a buggy act. Harry Hill and John McCracken with high school riding and Bernie High doing steeplechase and high hurdle jumps. Clown Ikey Lewis with jumping mules.

Display 16. Australian Waites in the center ring doing whip cracking. Ring one, Crane troupe acrobatics. Ring three, Avalon troupe acrobatics.

Display 17. Equestrian carrying acts with the Cottrells in center ring. Miss Meers and Mr. Ledoun in ring one and Mr. and Mrs. Charles Rooney, jockey act, in ring three.

Display 18. Aerial iron jaw acts. Leach Sisters over ring one, LaTell

# CIRCUS HAGENBECK WALLACE 3 RINGS 2 STAGES

Used For Its  
**6 Arenas**  
3 Railroad Trains—3  
12 Acres of Tents—12  
8 Military Bands—8  
3 Herds of Elephants—3  
**\$3,000,000 Capital Invested**



**300 TRAINED WILD ANIMALS FROM 300**  
The uncivilized world.  
Hagenbeck's Biggest  
and Most Complete  
Zoological Collection,  
performing in a mas-  
sive steel-girded arena.

**400 CIRCUS ARTISTS 400**

**100 - ACTS - 100**

60 AERIALISTS—60  
60 ACROBATS—60  
60 CLOWNS—60  
Million-Dollar Street  
Parade 10 A. M.  
on downtown streets  
opening day. Performances 2 and 8  
P. M. One 50c ticket admits to all.  
Children under 10 years, 25c.



## TRAINED WILD ANIMALS

# PASADENA FRI. 10 OCT.

Afternoon and Night

Highest Class  
Entertainment  
In the World

Reserved and Admis-  
sion tickets on sale  
Show Day at Jarvis &  
Prinz, 173 East Colora-  
do, at same price as  
charged at grounds.

This unusual ad was used by the Hagenbeck show in Pasadena, California in 1919 season. Pfening Archives.

Trio over ring two and LeRoy Trio over ring three.

Display 19. Hippodrome races on the track. 1, tandem riders; 2, a three horse flat race; 3, a three horse jockey race; 4, standard Roman chariot race and 5. liberty horses.

The Frontier Days after-show was a typical wild west concert which was given following the main performance. It was generally popular and found a sizeable crowd sitting in the reserved chairs twice a day. A fast show and a crowd pleaser, it was a mixture of wild riding, standing in the saddle, passing under the belly of a horse while running full tilt. Rope tricks, including the lassoing of five or six horses at a time, were a part of the show. Harry Hill was manager of the after-show using ten riders plus Ikey Lewis clown.

The lack of aerial acts was noticeable. The Flying Wards had long been a feature of the Hagenbeck-Wallace program. Their act had been broken up by deaths in the 1918 wreck. The performance seemed a bit on the short side as compared to former years. It appears the program remained the same throughout the season except for the Riding Rooneys who left at the end of June, and the Crandalls, gymnasts, who were added to the show about the same time.

reptiles. Walter Rhodes was manager of this show. This seems like a big production for what appears to have been a typical snake pit show, common on circus midways of today.

The 20th week started September 8 in Elko, Nevada after one of the two longest runs of the season, 265 miles. The show started a long California tour in Auburn on September 11. Auburn had been billed for a matinee only, but due to a late arrival the stand was cancelled and moved on to San Jose. Next came the longest stand of the season, three days in San Francisco. The show was playing seven days a week through the full California tour. Bakersfield was lost on October 4 because of a late arrival from Fresno. Moving south the circus was in Los Angeles on October 6 and 7. The California tour ended at El Centro on October 12.

The show entered Arizona at Yuma on October 13 for a matinee only and then played Phoenix. Three more Arizona dates were played followed by a single stand in New Mexico at Deming on October 18.

The clown alley numbered seventeen at the opening of the season and all remained during the season. This was a fairly large complement of clowns for a show of this size. While Athur Borella was perhaps the best known name in the 1919 clown alley, others were Lou Moore, Joe Coyle, Abe Aronson and Ernest White.

Eight stands in Texas opened at El Paso

The show moved back east of the Rockies starting August 25 in Oregon at Pendleton. Additional stands were played in Oregon, Idaho, Utah and Nevada. The train traveled 265 miles on a Sunday from Boise to Pocatello, Idaho.

In addition to the regular side show there was another show on the opposite side of the midway. The Spanish extravaganza *Juanita*, was billed as a lavish and out of the ordinary exhibition. The announcers and ticket sellers for this show were dressed in Spanish outfits. The tent, about 25 by 35 feet, housed Fred Poole in an elaborate costume in a well framed and appropriately decorated pit presented his

on October 20. San Antonio was played on October 25 and Houston on October 27. On October 29 the circus was in Crowley, Louisiana. Two days were played in New Orleans on November 1 and 2.

It went into Mississippi for twelve days starting at McComb on November 3. The final stand of the season was in Jackson, Tennessee on November 18. The home run to West Baden, Indiana was made in three jumps of 116, 135 and 81 miles. The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus arrived in West Baden early on November 20 after a season of 179 dates played, 5 days lost and 4 matinee only stands after a total milage of 15,031. It was a season almost seven months long and generally very successful.

No financial records are available regarding the 1919 season. However profits on the 1919 and 1920 seasons increased the earned surplus of the show to \$577,547.66, not too shabby for an investment of \$36,100.

I give my thanks to those who helped with this article: Circus World Museum, Albert Conover, Fred D. Pfening, Jr., John Polacsek and the late Col. William Woodcock, Sr.

The 1919 season route sheet was issued by mail man Joe Coyle. Pfening Archives.

## Au Revoir

Carl Hagenbeck-Wallace  
Circus



And St  
Was  
A Good  
Season

Season  
=1919=

May  
We  
Meet  
Again

# The Marketing Of The **BUFFALO BILL WILD WEST SHOW**

By John Polacsek

**T**he marketing of the "Great National Entertainment" during its formative years is considered a classic example of enticing the public to part with their money for an amusement feature. A number of creative techniques were used in 1885 and 1886, showing the imaginative thinking of William F. Cody, Nate Salisbury, and Adam Forepaugh. While some of these techniques were more successful than others, they brought the level of the new wild west show up to that of other established American amusements in two short years.

Although Buffalo Bill on his own constituted a national figure through his exploits and dime novel fame, a new attraction was needed for the 1885 season. In April of that year the Secretary of the Interior received a request from Cody to allow the famed Indian Sitting Bull to travel with him. Cody claimed that he was a man of honor, and military men of the stature of Generals Sherman, Miles, Cook and Terry would give testimony to that effect if necessary. However on the back of Cody's letter is a note stating that the Commissioner of Indian Affairs was to give "a very emphatic NO" to Cody's request and to "refer him to some of those whom he has heretofore enticed."<sup>1</sup> Buffalo Bill wanted Sitting Bull and on May 2 sent a telegram from Peru, Indiana to the Interior Department stating that Sitting Bull had requested permission to visit his wild

west show. Cody wondered if there were any objections to a visit by the Chief.<sup>2</sup>

Two weeks went by and Cody drafted another letter stating that Sitting Bull had formally requested to travel with his show. Cody also noted that he was not familiar with the procedures in obtaining Indians, and could the Interior Department please advise him.<sup>3</sup> It seems a little strange that Cody would ask for advice when he previously had petitioned for other Indians to travel with his show.

Buffalo Bill decided that testimonials from the appropriate people might cut some of the red tape. A letter from Major McLaughlin, the agent at the Standing Rock Indian Agency where Sitting Bull lived, gave a whole

hearted endorsement to the plan, and the hope that Cody's petition would be granted.<sup>4</sup> From St. Louis came a penned letter from General William T. Sherman who after cutting through all the rhetoric stated "Sitting Bull is a humbug, but has a popular fame on which he had a natural right to 'Bank.'"<sup>5</sup> Likewise a letter from Major General Eugene A. Carr made mention of the fact that he had known Buffalo Bill for over sixteen years, and he was "a truly honorable man and will fulfill all his engagements."<sup>6</sup>

The famous Sioux Chief Sitting Bull. Pfening Archives.

With the weight of these endorsements the Government consented to allow Sitting Bull to travel with the Buffalo Bill Wild West. A contract was drawn up and signed on June 6 setting aside a four month period when Sitting Bull was to be on the show. He was to be paid \$50 per week with two weeks salary in advance. There were to be five other Sioux Indians hired at \$25 per week. Sitting Bull has the exclusive



William F. Cody at age 37 in 1882. Pfening Archives.

right to sell his own photograph and autographs.

Sitting Bull joined the wild west show at Buffalo, New York on June 12, and the advertising immediately gave him star billing. Depending on where the show played, the ads read "SITTING BULL AND Buffalo Bill's Wild West." All during their east coast tour which took in Washington D. C., Philadelphia, and Boston the renowned Sitting Bull and his staff were highlighted in the advertising.

The role that Sitting Bull played was extremely limited. He rode in the parades with his staff, and during the performance he paraded in the arena as the commentator expounded on him. The vast majority of the press and reviews recall the interviews which were conducted in Sitting Bull's prominent tepee. While the venerable chief smoked a massive pipe made of redstone from the Sioux Reservation, his interpreter communicated his thoughts to the gathered reporters.

Sitting Bull's interviews allowed him to discuss the Indian Reservation and the poor rations that were being given to the Sioux. Even his letters were concerned with the treatment of the Indians at the Standing Rock



Agency. In August Sitting Bull had Nate Salsbury write a letter for him to a Mr. Atkins, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs while the show was in Hamilton, Ontario. Sitting Bull petitioned Atkins to hear his requests before he returned to the reservation.

A major concern of the Sioux was trespassing by army troops upon the hay and timber lands of the reservation. This was a subject of much discontent. Along with the loss of hay and timber was a request to verify the amount of rations that were allowed to the members of his tribe. Sitting Bull also requested that more than one trader be allowed on the reservation as he felt competition would be welcomed. Furthermore the men employed to teach his people how to farm did not speak his language, and he believed that better results could be reached if this was corrected. The letter as penned by Nate Salsbury was endorsed by Sitting Bull.<sup>7</sup>

While Sitting Bull was willing to discuss the situation on the reservation, he positively refused to talk about the Custer Massacre. The special theme that the show was promoting noted that they were "Enemies in '76--Friends in '85." The Custer theme was a double edged sword as Sitting Bull was damned and praised on various occasions.

Before the show played in Detroit, Michigan in September a series of pro and con articles appeared in the *Detroit News*. The first one, entitled "Custer's Slayer," was from an old soldier who thought it was terrible that Custer's murderer was to be paraded through the towns of Michigan.<sup>8</sup> A rebuttal quickly appeared from an ex-Northwest Mounted Policeman who interviewed the Indian after the fight. Accordingly no Indian knew who

Nate Salsbury met Cody when they both were in the theatrical world and became his long time partner. Pfening Archives.



killed Custer because he had cut his hair, furthermore from the way people talked one would have thought that Sitting Bull did the whole thing alone.<sup>9</sup>

Sitting Bull both attacked and defended in the national press, for he was a controversial figure. The *Detroit Free Press* referred to him as "The Indian General," and covered an interview between the local dignitaries and Sitting Bull. A rib roast was held within his tepee with a menu consisting of crackers, pickles, lemonade, and a good supply of Goebel's beer. Sitting Bull and his interpreter Bill Halsey watched as the Mayor of Detroit and other political figures were entertained.

When it came time to speak Sitting Bull stated through his interpreters words that he had met the white father (President Cleveland), and he believed that the President was going to be fair with the Indians. When asked what he was going to tell his people about his experiences with the wild west show he stated: "I have seen the white people and their great chief. I have seen how they live and my eyes are opened. I shall tell my children that the whites are as the leaves of the forest and that to them we are all as the single berry left on the bush. I shall tell them that the whites are our friends."<sup>10</sup>

After the route through Michigan the show traveled into Ohio where it was noted that Sitting Bull's participation was still limited. In Cleveland when it came time for the "Indian General" to appear he rode up on a blooded stallion past the grandstand, but took no part in any of the war dances or encounters with cowboys.<sup>11</sup> By the time the show reached Columbus, it was noted that Sitting Bull and his staff were coming up in front of the grandstand smoking cigars as they were being introduced by Manager Keen.<sup>12</sup> Sitting Bull then went to Indianapolis and closed the season in St. Louis after a two week stand.

The presence of a national figure, such as Sitting Bull added to the mystique that was attached to the wild west show. For the most part the thousands who jammed the grandstands could see but not touch the great Sioux. Those who visited Sitting Bull's tepee could meet him, perhaps purchase a photograph or autograph, and look on as he spoke through his interpreter. The amount of press that Sitting



Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill, "Foes in '76--Friends in '85." Pfening Archives.

Bull generated was well worth the cost to have him on the show.

The experience that Sitting Bull took back with him to the Standing Rock Reservation was not what the agency agent hoped he would return with. It was believed that Sitting Bull after his year of regimented movement and timing on the wild west would buckle down to some serious work. Within a short time of Sitting Bull's return the agent was forced to admit he was now "a great nuisance." The publicity had gone to his head and the agent wrote: "He is inflated with the public attention he received and has not profited by what he has seen, but tells the most astounding falsehoods to the Indians. He tells every person who he sees that the 'Great Father' in his interview with him told him that he was the only great Indian living, that he made him head chief of all the Sioux, that all Indians must do his bidding, that he was above his agent and could remove the agent or any employee whom he chose and that any Indian who disobeyed him or questioned his authority must be severely punished. Also that all Indian dances and customs that have been discontinued should be revived, 'sun dance' included and rations be issued in bulk."<sup>13</sup>

It was partly because of Sitting Bull's arrogance that he did not go out with the wild west show again. Cody's associates

# BUFFALO BILL!

"He is King of them all."—General E. A. Carr.

## ATHLETIC PARK.

COMMENCING TO-MORROW AFTERNOON  
JUNE 22 FOR THREE DAYS ONLY

Two Performances Daily, Afternoon and Evening, Rain or Shine.



## SITTING BULL

And Several of the Celebrated Late Hostile Warriors.

White Eagle and 52 Pawnee and Wichita Braves.

We fulfill every promise.—Cody and Salsbury.

Admission, 50 cents. Children, 25 cents.

Music furnished by the Wild West Cowboy Band.

Gates open 1 and 6 p. m. Performance commences at 7:30 a. m.  
Street Cars to the Gate.

Grand Street Parade to-morrow at 10 A. M.

Buffalo Bill newspaper ad featuring Sitting Bull used in Washington D. C. in 1885. Author's collection.

in the Spring of 1886 were sent a letter from the Standing Rock Agent Mr. McLaughlin telling them not to consider taking Sitting Bull off the reservation: "... [we do] not consider it advisable for Bull to travel again, as he is such a consummate liar and too vain and obstinate to be benefitted by what he sees, and makes no good use of the money he thus earns, but on the contrary spends it extravagantly among the Indians in trying to perpetuate baneful influences which the ignorant and non-progressive element are too ready to listen to and follow. Of the money and property that he brought home last fall, he did not have a dollar, or anything else (except the gray horse) left, after being three weeks at home and it was all used in feasting the Indians and trying to impress upon the Indians his own great importance, and I had a great deal of trouble with him and through him with other Indians caused by his own bad behavior and arrogance. I, however, have him under control again and would dislike to run similar risks."<sup>14</sup>

As a result Sitting Bull never traveled again with a wild west show.

The second major marketing technique was the show's efforts to exhibit on Sundays, based on its contention that it was an educational institution. The wild west

was not a circus, a menagerie, or a theatrical presentation. It was an educational experience according to Buffalo Bill and others. The well quoted Brick Pomeroy stated that to him: "There is more of real life, of genuine interest, of positive education in the startling exhibition than I have ever before seen, as it is so true to nature and life as it really is with those who are smoothing the way for millions to follow."<sup>15</sup>

In essence these were not actors on a stage, but rather real people doing what came naturally to them. By claiming that the show was an educational experience two very important goals were achieved: they could by-pass the usual performance license and they could play on Sunday.

The show normally set up in baseball parks for there was seating in the bleachers and a wide field on which to present the performance. Because Buffalo Bill leased the parks, the show management was of the opinion that they were covered by blanket license that had been granted to the ball park to put on exhibitions. As they came under the ball park license they could save a significant amount of money.

References to the wild west show attempting to get away with the non-payment of license fees occurred all during 1885. Early in June at Cleveland, Ohio the legal representative of Cuyahoga County visited the show and informed them that they owed \$60.00 for every day they exhibited. Cody and his business manager Nate Salsbury stated that the statute provided that any traveling public show giving exhibitions of horsemanship or natural curiosities must obtain a permit and pay a stipulated license fee. They both claimed that their show was exempt from paying the tax by a ruling from the State Auditor on the grounds that their entertainment was simply a view of real life in the West and no circus or show.<sup>16</sup>

Notwithstanding the State of Ohio's ruling the wild west show paid a license fee of \$180.00 to the county auditor under protest.<sup>17</sup> About a month later Buffalo Bill brought suit against the county treasurer in Common Pleas Court to recover the money. The petition stated that they had only presented a "equine dramatic exposition on grass or under canvas of the adventures of frontiersmen."<sup>18</sup> The suit stemmed from the fact that the proprietor of the park obtained a license to give exhibitions on his grounds for one year. No special license was secured for Buffalo Bill as it was thought that the general permit included this type of show. The county treasurer had other ideas, and on the second day of the stand threatened to attach the show for

non-payment of the license. Cody protested that the show could not be classed as a circus, and that no special fee could legally be demanded—hence the petition to the court.<sup>19</sup> It was not until the wild west show returned to Cleveland in September that the outcome of the case was decided. A decision on September 29 found in favor of the county treasurer, and against Cody. Even though the show maintained that the nature of their exhibition made them exempt from assessment, the Common Pleas Court Judge felt that the \$180.00 should remain in the county treasury.<sup>20</sup>

This judgement had a bearing on an action in Pittsburgh. Reportedly Cody objected to a \$200.00 a day license fee stating that he was putting on an educational experience.<sup>21</sup> It was only after Buffalo Bill was arrested that he decided to pay the local license fee.<sup>22</sup> These are just a few of the examples of the show's attempts to avoid paying the license.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West in the words of General William T. Sherman was "wonderfully realistic and historically reminiscent."<sup>23</sup> By placing the show in a unique category it was possible to sidestep some of the protest that had been directed toward shows that performed on Sunday. At the beginning of the season the show was detained from opening on Saturday at the Chicago Driving Park, and decided to open on Sunday, May 17.

Only one performance was given in Sandusky, Ohio by the Buffalo Bill show in 1885. Author's collection.

## BUFFALO BILL.

"He is King of them all."—Gen. E. A. Carr.

Sandusky Fair Grounds, Sandusky, Ohio,  
**THURSDAY, SEPT. 17.**

Positively only One Performance—Afternoon Only—Rain or Shine. Gates open at 1 p. m. Performance commences at 2:30 p. m.



LARGER AND GREATER THAN EVER.  
The following are a few of the numerous features: The renowned SIOUX CHIEF

## SITTING BULL

And staff, White Eagle and fifty-two braves. The only one-legged Sioux Spy, Frisking Elk. The great marksman from the Western border, Miss Annie Oakley. The largest herd of buffalo ever exhibited. Grand Indian buffalo hunt, known as the "Surround." The phenomenal boy-shoot, Johnny Baker, Cowboy Kid, Set Clover, the unequalled cowboy shot, shooting at marbles, half-dollars and nickels. Mustang Jack, the champion jumper, jumping over a horse 164 hands high. Buffalo Bill will shoot at clay pigeons from traps; also with revolver, rifle, on foot and on horseback at full speed, at glass balls. Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys, in novel equestrianism, lassoing and riding of wild Texas steers. Riding of ten bucking horses by ten cowboys wilder than the horses themselves; 100 cowboys, Mexicans, Indians and Scouts in the saddle at one time. The Death and stage coach attack by Indians. Desperate battle scenes by Indians, cowboys and scouts on horseback. Yellow Hand's death by Buffalo Bill. Bucking horses, wilder than ever. Music furnished by the famous cowboy band. We fulfill every promise.

CODY & SALSURY, Proprietors.

ADMISSION, 50 Cents; Children, 25 Cents.  
Street cars run direct to the grounds. Grand street parade Thursday, September 17th, at 10 a. m. Excursions on all railroads.

CHICAGO DRIVING PARK,  
West Madison-st.

## FOR A SHORT SEASON,

Commencing Sunday, May 17.

Doors open at 1 p. m. Performance at 3:30 p. m.  
Every Day, rain or shine. AFTERNOONS ONLY.  
Maj. Gen. Eugene A. Carr, U. S. Army, says: "He is  
King of them all."

# Buffalo Bill's Wild West

"It is wonderfully realistic and historically re-  
miniscent."—Gen. W. T. Sherman.

## This Grand Entertainment Recon- structed, Enlarged, and Improved.

Admission—50 cents. Children, 25 cents.  
Grand Street Cavalcade Saturday Night.  
Street cars run to the gate. C. B. & O. R. R. will run  
trains every afternoon from Union Depot to grounds,  
leaving at 2:45, and return after performance.  
W. F. CODY, NATE SALSBUURY, Proprietors.

Cody's show broke the rules in Chicago  
when he showed on Sunday in 1886. Au-  
thor's collection.

The exhibition began a two week stand  
and incurred the wrath of the Chicago Re-  
form Alliance which protested against the  
Sunday shows.<sup>24</sup>

The Sunday shows were abandoned  
until later in the season. A new strategy  
was developed to promote the Sunday  
performance as a religious affair. As the  
show planned to perform in Detroit,  
Michigan on September 6, the advertising  
noted that this was a chance to see Sitting  
Bull and Buffalo Bill's Wild West along  
with the great religious exhibition. It was  
to be a grand exhibition of Indian rites  
and ceremonies in connection with a  
grand sacred concert by the wild west  
cowboy band. The whole affair was an in-  
structive and moral entertainment fully  
equal to the weekly performances of Buf-

falo Bill's Wild West. The public would  
have the opportunity to visit the wild  
west camp where they would learn  
more frontier life in one hour, than  
twenty years on the frontier could im-  
part.<sup>25</sup> The *Detroit Free Press* noted that  
the Sunday performance was some-  
thing to behold in its review the fol-  
lowing day: "The 'Indian rites and cer-  
emonies' and 'sacred concert' by  
Buffalo Bill's Wild West combination  
at Recreation Park yesterday afternoon  
drew a very large crowd. There was  
no difference be-  
tween the per-  
formance given there  
yesterday afternoon  
and that on week  
days, excepting that  
there were no dis-  
plays of marksmanship or other use of  
firearms, probably  
because it was ex-  
pected that any such  
discharge of gun-  
powder would  
awaken the knowl-  
edge of the author-  
ities to the manner of  
'sacred concert' that

was going on. However, the large au-  
dience seemed to thoroughly enjoy  
this Sunday show in a city that has not  
tolerated Sunday performances and on  
the grounds of a base ball organization  
that has protested against Sunday  
games. There were no 'Indian rites,'  
and the 'sacred concert' consisted of  
such hymnal melodies as 'Yankee Doo-  
dle' and 'Home Again.' After the show  
Sitting Bull held an informal reception  
while the tepees and tents were dis-  
appearing in Hendrie's trucks. The  
'Wild West' got away last night, and  
appears at Adrian today."<sup>26</sup>

The Sunday show was not a great suc-  
cess, possibly because of the opposition to  
playing on the Sabbath, and because the  
show needed some Sundays to make the  
rail jump to the next stand.

The final marketing technique to be  
considered was the promotion by Adam  
Forepaugh of the Buffalo Bill Wild West  
Show in 1886. The show's route book  
notes that in 1886 they opened in St. Louis  
in May, then played through to New York  
where they opened a long season at Eras-  
tina, Staten Island in June. They remained  
on the Island until September 30th, then  
opened a winter season at Madison  
Square Garden, Thanksgiving eve, and  
closed on Washington's Birthday in 1887.

It is no secret that Adam Forepaugh  
liked wild west performances as they  
were included as part of his circus. It was  
a major secret however that something  
was afoot early in 1886. In February Buf-

falo Bill was at Staten Island, New York.  
At the same time Adam Forepaugh wrote  
his press representative Louis Cooke in-  
quiring whether he had seen Cody. Fore-  
paugh's letter also had references re-  
garding their percentage of a deal.<sup>27</sup>

What was transpiring was a major mar-  
keting coup with Adam Forepaugh plan-  
ning to open Buffalo Bill's Wild West  
Show at Madison Square Garden. There is  
proof that Forepaugh made a conscious  
effort to keep the arrangement quiet, and  
succeeded.



The grand entry of the Buffalo Bill Wild  
West on Staten Island, New York during  
the summer of 1886. Pfening Archives.

On June 28, Buffalo Bill opened at Eras-  
tina Woods, Mariners Harbor on Staten  
Island. The show was a combination of  
"Merit, instruction, pleasure and educa-  
tion in an epitome of our nation's his-  
tory."<sup>28</sup> About this same time Forepaugh  
noted that he was prepared to negotiate  
with the most gigantic amusement en-  
terprises of the world as he was ready to  
inaugurate his control of Madison Square  
Garden. Apparently Forepaugh wanted  
Buffalo Bill and got him.

The engagement of the Buffalo Bill  
show at the Garden was agreed to in se-  
crecy. The articles were signed on July 28  
between Forepaugh and Cody with the  
usual consideration of one dollar being  
paid each other.

Forepaugh was to furnish Madison  
Square Garden together with the ne-  
cessary municipal licenses, services of jan-  
itors, watchmen, gas men, engineers,  
chair women, ticket sellers, and all other  
regular attaches of the building. He was  
also to provide all the tickets, do the bill-  
posting, lithographing, and publishing of  
daily advertisements to the extent of four  
squares of thirty-two lines per day in each  
paper. For this he received fifty percent of  
the gross receipts up to and including the  
sum of \$3,000.00 of each and every week's  
business, and forty percent over that  
amount.

Buffalo Bill provided Indians, cowboys, musicians, Mexicans, celebrities, performers, ticket takers, door tenders, horses, ponies, buffalo, elk and other animals for the performance. They were to give at least six night and two matinee performances each week. They were also to provide all pictorial printing, programs, lithographs, hangers and cards necessary. Buffalo Bill would receive fifty percent of \$3,000.00, and sixty percent of anything over that for each week's engagement.<sup>29</sup>

It was Forepaugh's responsibility to furnish the scenery for the performance, as long as both parties deemed it necessary. The profits from the refreshment stands, special privileges, and the sale of articles, except books and photographs, were to be divided on a percentage basis. The articles of agreement covered the expenses of ushers, complimentary tickets and other necessary subjects.

The contract was to go into effect on November 22 and continue for two weeks, or a period so much longer as the gross receipts did not fall below \$8,000.00 per week. The show was to cease on March 5 so Forepaugh could open his 1887 circus at the Garden.

For the mutual benefit of both parties all advertising was to contain the announcement of "Madison Square Garden, Adam Forepaugh Sole Lessee," but in no way worded to infer that Forepaugh was in any manner identified with Buffalo Bill Wild West Show. This was to maintain the dignity of its title and proprietorship. As an added note, no public announcement of this engagement could be made until six weeks previous to the date of opening. If either party reneged it would cost the \$5,000.00 for non-fulfillment of the contract.<sup>30</sup>

The contract was signed and almost immediately adjusted. On October 1, Cody telegraphed Forepaugh that he needed to supply all the extra seating facilities as they were to change the floor plan of the Garden. In addition, if Forepaugh would pay Cody the sum of \$7,000.00 the wild west show would furnish all the scenery and necessary rigging, but at the end of the season the scenery and rigging would revert to Cody. Apparently Forepaugh agreed to this for one of Buffalo Bill's relatives who was on the show wrote: "They have all the say so about everything to do and what to do and Forepaugh furnishes the money to fix up the grounds and scenery. . . . All this I write, you need

not say anything about as I do not want anyone to find out through me as there is not many that knows about this Forepaugh bis."<sup>31</sup>

The action that was undertaken to bring the wild west show to Madison Square Garden was very secret, just for what reason one cannot say. The whole affair was chronicled by Louis Cooke, press representative for Forepaugh, but never released to the press. The following article, the manuscript for which is in the Dunn/Tibbals collection, was written

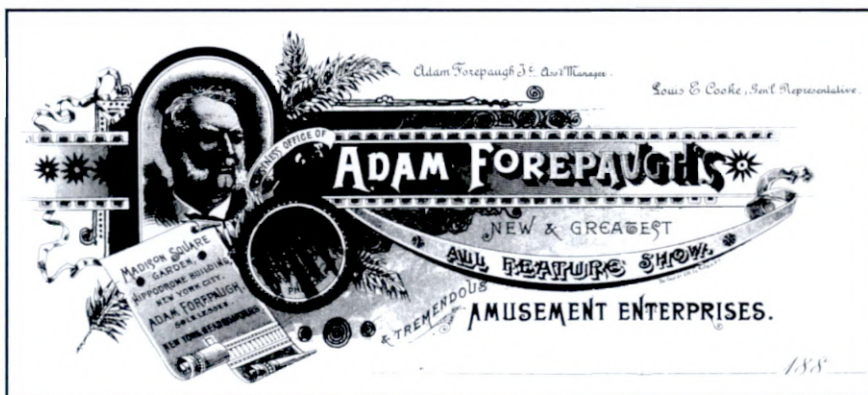
drama of Civilization which shall be acted by living factors in it. The arena is to be divided into a curtained space that will be the scene of action, and which will be set with appropriate scenery from the brush of Mr. Matt Morgan. It will reveal at least four distinct phases of nature--the scenes representing the Primeval forest, at night; the boundless prairie at noonday; the clearing and settlement of a mining camp; and the military life of the Fort. Into these scenes will be distributed in connected and coherent order the men and animals

that are to tell with deeds the story of the fight of civilization with nature and barbarism.

"Thus the Primeval forest will present a picture at once mysterious, and animated, of the trackless wilderness inhabited only by the wild beasts and the wilder savages. Both will be seen in the dusks and dawns of the landscape. The prairie scene will present

the buffalo hunt, the emigrant train of 'Prairie schooners,' the bivouac, and the prairie fire and stampede of wild animals. There will also be shown the whole murderous method of Indian warfare; and the rescue of the pioneers by the rough riders of the plains.

"The attempt," said Mr. MacKaye, 'is to utilize the splendid material placed at my disposal in a narrative with a central idea and an ultimate dramatic purpose; to tell the story of the redemption of a continent as that story has been told for a hundred years. In this way only can the exhibition be made historical, heroic, and pictorial in the highest sense, and by this method alone can it be made educational without becoming any the less spectacular, or interesting. The spectator will see in two hours the whole epic of the border pass before his eyes, from the proem of the wilderness, to the struggle of the soldiers with armed tribes. That epic will open with a pastoral symphony in the jungle and end with a martial combat in the valley of the Little Big Horn. It will be enacted, not by mimics and illustrated by properties, but will have the real pioneers, the living heroes of the plains, and all the genuine accompaniments of animated nature from the antelope, and the jack rabbit, to the cinnamon bear, and the moose. At least five hundred people will be employed as dramatic personnel, and over three hundred animals. Mr. Forepaugh who has been thoroughly imbued with the worthiness of the scheme, has furnished carte blanche for the scenic and



Adam Forepaugh's 1886 letterhead listing him as Sole Lessee of Madison Square Garden. Pfening Archives.

prior to the opening of the show and notes in minute detail the actions that were undertaken at the Garden:

"A novel and extensive scheme in the show business, which promises a rather higher and even more expensive form of entertainment than has hitherto been offered, has been consummated by Mr. Adam Forepaugh in conjunction with Messrs. Salisbury and Cody the proprietors of the 'Wild West.' Mr. Forepaugh, it seems, after years of rivalry with his old competitor Mr. P. T. Barnum, has at last got possession of the Madison Square Garden on a long lease, and this virtually shuts Mr. Barnum out of New York. This feat was accomplished by Mr. Forepaugh's business manager, Mr. Cooke. Having secured the Garden, the next step was to put in for the winter a new and improved form of entertainment. In consultation with Messrs. Salisbury and Cody, it was determined that the enormous menage of the wild west should be organized into a story of action and deeds. For this purpose the services of Mr. Steele MacKaye were secured, and yesterday that gentleman furnished to the press the first information in regard to the project. He was found at the Garden amid an army of carpenters and laborers, and proceeded at once to explain the character of the scheme.

"I propose," he said, 'to present here a

**MADISON SQUARE GARDEN.**  
ADAMS FOREPAUGH Sole Managers LOTTIE COOKE, Dist. Manager, 80 Mr. Forepaugh

**BUFFALO BILLS' OFFICIAL**  **WILD WEST PROGRAMME.**

Allen & Ginter's—VIRGINIA BRIGHTS—CIGARETTES.

DR. JACOB'S  
Sanitary Woolen System Co.,  
827-829 BROADWAY, N.Y.

DR. GUSTAV JACOB'S  
Sanitary Corsets and Bedding  
PRESERVE HEALTH  
IMPROVE HEALTH  
AND RESTORE HEALTH  
**ESCAPES**  
They are all made of Pure, Colored,  
Natural Colored Wool.

**R&G CORSETS ARE THE BEST**

**R&G CORSETS ARE THE BEST**

**BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST!**

**THE WILD WEST!**  
HON. W. F. CODY, "BUFFALO BILL"

**WATERS PIANOS.**

**HALL'S BALSAM**

**ADAMS' TUTTI FRUTTI CHEWING GUM**

Program used by the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show in Madison Square Garden on February 9, 1887. Pfening Archives.

mechanical effects, and the estimated expense for the adaptation of the Garden and the preparation of the pictures is a trifle over sixty thousand dollars.

"Mr. MacKaye then pointed out the improvements that are being made in the arena. The whole eastern end of the Garden is being transformed into an inclined campus, which is to take the place of a stage. It is over two hundred feet deep, and is to be carefully set, like a theatrical stage, with the elaborate and massive scenery. Mr. Matt Morgan is now preparing. It is to be set with pools of living water and planted with trees upon which backgrounds are to disport as in their native wilds, the native mustangs of our forests and plains. At least a thousand feet of steam pipe will be required for the prairie fire alone, and in order to manufacture the dawn that is to steal through the trees and light up the jungle, the most expensive electrical apparatus will be used.

"Mr. MacKaye spoke with allowable pride of the superior worth and interest of such a living transcript of the chivalry, the heroism, the danger, and the triumphs of real life, to the ordinary theatrical glit of the circus arena, and through that the pictures and the persons would present an exhibition of splendid realism that had never been surpassed.

"Among other novel devices he mentioned 'wind effects' to be introduced in the mining camp, where the stage coach would be struck by a cyclone in the mountains and blown to pieces as it crosses the divide. In the final scene, of an Indian battle with the U. S. troops, the whole length of the arena will be used, and a trained troop of one hundred cavalry men will make a dash with drawn sabers from end to end of the Garden. An officer of the United States Army, who is to impersonate the late lamented Custer, will arrive in this city on Tuesday for rehearsals, and it is understood that he will bring with him a troop of men who were participants in the last Custer fight. A plot, the exact size of the Garden, has been staked out at Erastina, and there, Mr. Cody will rehearse his men, during the continuance of the horse show at the Garden.

"Mr. MacKaye expects to be ready by the 22nd of November and in the mean while the clans are being gathered on the reservations and sent on by the agents of the wild west.

"Mr. Matt Morgan said that the scenic work was the most extensive, and he thought would be, the most effective he had ever executed. Something like fifty thousand yards of canvas will be covered before the work is complete."

On November 24, 1886 the wild west show opened at Madison Square Garden and was a great success. The crowds were tremendous.

From these formative years the wild west show developed into a major amusement genre. It can be seen that there were some unique marketing techniques employed which the circus and menagerie could not use. The ideas of national celebrities, non-payment of license fees, Sunday shows, and a major promotion at Madison Square Garden all were attempted.

Thanks to Dunn/Tibbals collection for the use of the Louis Cooke material and the secret contract between Forepaugh and Cody. In addition the Pfening Archives and the National Archives were helpful in piecing together this story.

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3037 Grass Valley Hwy.  
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# ONLY BIG SHOW COMING

Chapter 8 Part Two

## Several, Singular, Separate Shows, Solidified

By Orin C. King

1886

**S**ells Brothers' Enormous Railroad Shows in 1886 embarked on its first tour of California. Although the show persistently described the journey as its "First Trans-Continental Tour, From Ocean to Ocean, From Atlantic's busy marts to Pacific's Golden Shores!" there was never a reference in the Kansas press of any dates played on the Atlantic seaboard in 1886, but there was no doubt that Kansas lay across the route, both east and west, outward bound and homeward. The season in Kansas might be described as two in one.

Outward bound the show exhibited in the following Kansas towns, among others, entering Kansas from Lamar, Missouri, where performances were given on May 6: May 7, Pittsburg; May 8, Joplin, Mo.; May 10, Parsons; May 11, Cherryvale; May 12, Elk Falls; May 13, Wellington; May 14, Harper; May 15, Winfield; May 17, Ottawa; May 18, Burlington; May 19, Emporia; May 20, Junction City; May 22, Ellsworth; May 25, Salina; May 26, Beloit; May 27, Minneapolis; May 28, Clay Center; May 29, Belleville; May 31, Concordia; June 1, Washington; June 9, Seneca; June 10, Marysville.

After an absence of nearly five months the show returned to Kansas, playing out the season: November 1, Garden City; November 2, Dodge City; November 3, Larned; November 4, St. John; November 5, Hutchinson; November 6, Augusta (end of season); November 8, Pierce City, Mo. (cancelled).

The first announcement for the May 7 exhibitions appeared in a handout in the Pittsburg *Smelter*, March 27. Newspaper advertising began April 10, while the bill

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posters under the direction of A. F. Clark papered the town on April 21.

The same two column, full length ad was used in nearly every town. "4 Trains" were required according to the ad to move the show, because "The transportation of this prodigious thrice enlarged aggregation of Shows, consisting as it does of SELLS' SEVERAL, SINGULAR, SEPARATE SHOWS SOLIDIFIED, is universally pronounced the most hazardous undertaking ever known in the world of amusements."

With "One Million Dollars Involved!" everything had to be tripled. "Three times the largest traveling trains, three times as many employees, three times more accomplished Actors, three times the salary list, and as a natural consequence three times the fun and three times more show than ever you saw since you were born. Sells Brothers confidently expect to draw three times as many people as any of their predecessors."

At the bottom of the ad was a solemn promise that made attendance all but compulsory if one wished to know the ultimate in entertainment.

"N.B.--At the end of the present season the existing Sells Syndicate of three shows will be dissolved, and each separate establishment resume its own proper circuit. Never again will the three shows travel in conjunction at one price of admission to all."

The *Smelter* made no reference to the show after the exhibitions.

The Parsons *Sun*, speaking of the exhibitions of May 10, published the following review: "Sells Brothers' show gave

two exhibitions in this city Monday, and in all respects fulfilled what they promised on the bills to do. The parade was a good one, over a mile in length, and presented several new features. The menagerie is extensive and embraces a large variety of animals, many of which are rare and curious. The circus is one of the largest and most complete on the road. The performances were given in two rings and a stage, and programme was a good one throughout, giving the best of satisfaction."

The Wellington *Daily Press* held an opposing view to that of the Parsons paper, and commented that the exhibitions of May 13, drew "a very slim attendance at

Sells Bros. newspaper ad in the spring of 1886 on their way to California. Kansas State Historical Society.

15 SEASONS, 15



WILL EXHIBIT AT

Wellington Thursday MAY 13.

SELLS BROTHERS'  
NEW DEPARTURE.

In arranging for their FIRST TRANS-CONTINENTAL TOUR, the SELLS BROTHERS determined to outshine all precedent and outdo all previous visitors in their line to the Pacific Slope, have made a BOLD STROKE FOR FORTUNE by combining their

3 SEVERAL, SHOWS  
SEPERATE, ALL IN ONE,

TREBLING THE EXPENSES and securing THREE TIMES THE ATTRACTIONS. They are forced to present

AN ASTOUNDING ARRAY OF ARENIC ART-  
ISTS IN THREE RINGS,

TREMENDOUS - - THEATRE - - STAGE

the circus this afternoon. The performance was inferior.

"A number of gamblers accompanied Sells' circus," according to the *Press*. "This is a new departure. Heretofore they have discountenanced them and this is one reason why Sells' circus has been such a favorite with the people."

The *Press* reduced the number of trains from four to three when it reported that "Conductors Davis, Bridges and Wooden will bring the circus trains into Wellington tonight."

The *Press* reported that "one hundred and twenty-seven people came in on the Santa Fe to interview the elephant." It was no surprise that the street cars did a good business, but the items offered by street-corner merchants contained a few surprises. "A knife and spectacle dealer, a notion dealer and a patent washing machine were among the number exhibiting to the curious crowd."

The parade prompted the greatest reaction from the people of Wellington. According to the *Press*, "The morning parade of Sells Bros. disappointed the crowds on Washington avenue by avoiding it after having paid \$50 for the privileges, for the reason that they were warned by Mr. Sanders, telegraph agent here, that if they interfered with their wires they would have a law suit on their hands. The citizens and city officials are indignant and will see that the wires are placed where they belong."

The *Summer County Standard*, Wellington, claimed that the circus wagons were "too tall to pass under the telephone and telegraph wires. Thus thousands of people were disappointed by waiting at convenient points along the avenue until it was announced that the train of cages, chariots, elephants, clowns, etc., had passed back to the show grounds."

The *Standard* was impressed with the way Charles Madden, "the clever press agent," paid promptly the advertising bill. "They run a good show, transact business with the people in a business like manner and win the esteem of all; and as long as Mr. Madden takes care of the press there will be no special cause for complaint."

The *Standard* took issue with the *Press* regarding the utility wires on Washington Avenue: "It seems to be the wish of said paper to throw all of the blame onto Mr. Saunders, manager of the Western Union telegraph line and Mr. Chipchase, manager of the telephone line, and have been urging the council to put these companies to the expense of raising their wires throughout the city, for the simple reason that circus wagons cannot pass under them."

In conclusion the *Standard* snorted that, "If the show men don't like the way things are run in Wellington, let them stay away and the people will be the richer by their doing so."

Only the Wellington *Daily Postal Card* went to the source of the of the conflict and reported the following to the editor: "Editor *Postal Card*: Will you please inform the citizens of Wellington and the



The Melrose Family presented a bicycle act on Sells Bros. in 1886. Pfening Archives.

indignant council, as termed by the *Press*, that I gave Sells Brothers no such warning as stated in the *Press*; neither did I say they would have a lawsuit on their hands. The facts in the case are simply this: Last season while the circus was making its parade they did come in contact with our wires, crossing them and mixing them up some time, thereby completely stopping the business of the telegraph company for several hours, and causing me no little trouble and labor fixing them up. The circus company, apparently indifferent to the rights of the telegraph company, and completely ignoring the caution I gave them in crossing under the wires to be careful of them, that the business of the company might not be stopped. In view of this fact, and to impress caution upon the drivers of the wagons, I gave Mr. Sells the following written notice:

'Wellington, Kas., May 12  
'Messrs. Sells Bros., City--

'Gentlemen: You are hereby notified that while moving your parade through and along the streets of Wellington you will be held liable for any damages that may result from your caravans, wagons flag poles or other high vehicles, by coming in contact with our wires and thereby interrupting or in any manner interfering with the transmission of the business of the W. U. Telegraph company. Resp'y yours, J. T. Sanders.'

"Now Mr. Editor, I had no intention of stopping the parade, neither was it necessary, as I subsequently told Mr. Sells personally all I wanted was that his men use due caution in passing under the wires, that the business might not be interrupted; and had I not taken this precaution and the wires torn down and the *Press* man had occasion to have used them he would have censured me for inattention to the interests of the Telegraph Company, as he has without cause in the instance referred to this p. m. Resp'y J. T. Sanders. Wellington, May 13th."

For the Harper date on May 14, the *Daily Graphic* ran 15 insertions of the Sells ad, two columns by the length of the page, and while reaping a harvest of Sells' dollars had the effrontery to publish the following:

"Stop! Ponder!

"Have you ever thought what a sell these traveling 'shows' are that advertise in such glowing language and in such brilliant colors?

"I have no hesitancy in saying that the one to be here this month is rightly named. After you have been there and reflected over the matter carefully you will come to the conclusion that this 'colossal, giant wonder,' Sells about every person that wanders beneath its huge canopy that covers five acres of ground. Ground and air is about all it does cover.

"Think again. Perhaps about \$1,000 or \$2,000 of hard earned money will change hands and fully two thirds of that amount will be taken out of circulation as far as Harper is concerned. You cry hard times! These bug shows help make them. They give no equivalent for what you see. Keep the money at home. If you must rid yourselves of the money laid up for that eventful day, buy a good book or donate that amount to the library association, and receive permanent benefit, moral and healthy benefit.

"How many that day will be duped by 'smart alecks' and smart thieves no one will pretend to conjecture.

"That some one will be so foolish as to allow the confidence men or thieves who

always follow shows to swindle them is quite probable.

"If you take in the show, be sure the show don't take you in. Don't expect to see more than about one tenth of what they advertise.

"In this 'greatest combination on earth,' all of which you may see for fifty cents expect to get about ten cents worth and you will come nearer the value.

"Remember, that Harper will have about, from \$1,000 to \$2,000 withdrawn from her circulation on account of this, 'colossal, stupendous, gigantic Hippodrome.'"

In spite of its early unkind statements, the *Graphic* reported the events of the day honestly and with compassion: "The circus has come and gone again. The gorgeous array of painted wagons and animals from foreign countries, the music, the fat woman, the steam calliope and the trick mules are things of the past. All things considered the show was a very creditable one. The sun rose bright and clear, giving promise of a nice day, but alas for human hopes, before the time the afternoon performance commenced the rain began to fall down. It accompanied by a strong wind. When the performance was about half through a huge gust of wind split the top of the tent and another following in quick succession, dislocated it to such an extent that it came down, scattering the people in all directions. The presence of mind of a few cool-headed ones prevented a general stampede and no one was hurt, all passing out quickly but quietly. This of course broke up the afternoon performance, but work was at once commenced toward repairing the damage, and by the time for the evening performance they were ready to amuse the people again. Considering all the disadvantages this was very good, even though it was obliged to show in the open air. The canvas was old, causing it to be torn to ribbons, but the company carries more than one tent. However, the short time prevented anything but the side curtains from being erected. This of course was an inconvenience, but could not be helped."

The advance for several of the Kansas dates was directed by S. H. Barrett who for a number of years had managed the number two Sells' show. The *Ellsworth Reporter* commented on the presence of Barrett who was described as "very much of a gentlemen and is thoroughly posted

in his business." The show played Ellsworth on May 22.

The *Salina Republican* ran a short and humorous handout concerning the show's leading clown: "Billy Burke, of the Sells Brothers' Shows, is an old soldier, but none of his jokes are. That accounts for his successful drilling of 'Sid,' the clown elephant. Before he was bald he was red headed, but he read so much it all dropped out. Winters his head is used as a school globe. He never combs his hair."



Prof. John White's dog act as illustrated in the 1886 Sells Bros. courier. Pfening Archives.

The show attracted large crowds on May 25, and the performance was considered "very good."

For the exhibitions in Beloit on May 26, a local merchant ran a tie-in ticket promotion. The *Beloit Gazette*, May 21, reported that, "All cash buyers of Dry Goods, Boots, Shoes, Hats, Caps, Clothing and Notions, at Usher's, to the amount of \$5, on or before the 26th inst., will receive a free ticket to Sells Bros.' big circus and menagerie, which shows Beloit on said day." The effectiveness of Usher's sale was not reported.

Following show day the *Gazette* had harsh things to say: "Sells Bros.' show has come and gone, and while it is a medium fair circus and menagerie it is also a combination of swindling and fraud of the most pronounced type. The street parade was a big advertisement that failed to materialize under the canvas to a great extent. Numerous cases of nothing more or less than stealing developed, and only the presence of officers who compelled a restitution, saved several parties from being outrageously robbed. Our advice to the people of the cities visited by this show is

to watch them if you don't want to be taken in and done for."

The *Gazette* complimented the city authorities for refusing to license numerous "fakirs, soap men, snide jewelry outfits, prize package swindlers, of plying their swindling games."

The *Belleville Telescope*, after the exhibitions of May 29, commented on a circus feature that was a pleasure to all lovers of horse flesh, which in 1886 included nearly the entire population: "Sells Bros. had

with them about three hundred as fine looking horses as we have ever seen in Kansas. They were nearly all of them Normans and many of them full blooded. We could not help contrasting them with farm horses which were in town and thinking how much better it would have been if our farmers would all make an effort to improve their stock horses."

S. H. Barrett was again in charge of the advance and impressed the *Washington County Register*, Washington, as a "perfect gentleman and a thorough business man." The parade on June 1, "was without

doubt the finest that was ever seen in Washington. Everything new and bright, splendid bands, fine horses, good looking people, and a large number of beautiful wagons and cages.

"Sells Brothers' circus was a success here. The tent was jam full, the whole affair conducted in good style."

After a lengthy and successful tour of the far west, Sells Brothers returned to Kansas to play out the last week of the season, beginning with Garden City on November 1. The advance crew did their job well in Garden City, planting three lengthy handouts in the *Daily Herald*, plus a half page two-column ad that ran in the *Herald* 13 times. The *Herald* on show day printed an article that provides an interesting picture of the aggregation.

"Sells Bros.' Great Railroad Show.

"Last evening about 4 o'clock Sells Bros. immense train of thirty-two acres pulled in on the south switch at the yards. A gaping crowd of four or five hundred people were there to witness the unloading. The littlest woman on earth got off in company with the biggest one. The fat man and the lean man, and monstrosities of both sexes, all sizes and ages, wiggled and waggled themselves off the cars to the intense delight of the lookers on. At the other end of the train the six elephants and seven dromedaries were let off in

charge of their trainers. The young elephant whose first name we have forgotten, though rather too large for a baby has not forgotten his baby tricks, and he persisted in making himself familiar with everybody. A team of horses hitched to a haystack, on the opposite side from the train were peacefully chewing their hay, unaware of the fact that such strange looking animals were so near. When the young elephant, inspired by a spirit of investigation, walked around the stack and extended his trunk right in the face of the horses. The one nearest him made a spring in the opposite direction, knocked his mate down and turned a somersault over him. Then they both scrambled to their feet and broke their halters at a simultaneous jump and away they went with elevated tails, the worst pair of frightened horses that ever pawed prairie. If they kept a straight course at the speed they started out on, they are way over in Missouri this morning and their owner is using long cuss words denouncing shows generally and elephants in particular.

"The animals were taken to the pond to drink and this operation alone was 'well worth the price of admission.'"

"To watch an elephant dip his proboscis in the water, bring it up and throw his head back and jam the thing into his throat, shut one eye and flap one ear and put on the most satisfied expression of countenance imaginable is a spectacle that would provoke laughter from a saint. The grounds were all staked off with little flags some red and some white, and each indicated the position of certain stakes. The stakemen went around six in a gang each with a big hammer and the 'rat-tat-tat' of these hammers sent down thousands of stakes at double quick.

"The employees were a tough looking crowd as such crowds usually are. but they did their work well and it was noticeable that but little swearing or strong language was indulged in. There were lots of ladies on the ground and we believe they heard no offensive language."

After the above story, nothing further was reported by the *Herald*.


The second stand of the week, Dodge City on November 2, encountered opposition from an unusual source and according to the Dodge City *Democrat*, the matinee "was but slimly attended." November 2 was election day and as usual Kansas was ablaze with political warfare. The *Democrat* reported that the evening performance "was witnessed by an immense crowd. General dissatisfaction is expressed by those who attended. The majority of the people say it was the worst circus ever given in the city. They will have to do better next time if they want a crowd."

Small credence should be given the opinion of the *Democrat* for the editor had apparently forgotten the miserable little show of Col. Hall, Mlle. Corinne and James T. Johnson, and his report of "general dissatisfaction" and the "worst circus ever given in the city" was not echoed by any other town in Kansas.

Exhibitions were given in Larned on November 3. The handouts run in the Larned *Eagle-Optic* are the only reports listing names of individual performers. Mentioned were Miss Pauline Lee, equestrienne juggler; William "Billy" Burke, clown; Donaldson Brothers, contortionists; Leslie Brothers, head-to-head balancers; Prof. White, dogs; William Sells, bounding jockey; Stirk and Zeno, flying trapeze; Miss Minnie Minnette, iron jaw;

Sells Bros. newspaper ad used in Garden City, Kansas in the fall of 1886. Kansas State Historical Society.

HOMEWARD BOUND FROM THE MOST SUCCESSFUL TOUR EVER MADE OF  
The Pacific Slope.



15th Successful Season!

# SELLS BROS.'

ENORMOUS RAILROAD SHOWS  
WILL EXHIBIT AT  
Garden City, Monday, Nov. 1.

Combining a Triple Syndicate of Several Separate Superb Circulation Shows hitherto traveling as distinct organizations and now for the first time all

## Three United in One!

Peerless Perfection Personified. Company of Clever Clowns. Revolving Sensational Stunts. Wild Wrestling of Wonders. Various Vicious Vaulter. Lots of Lofly Leapers. World's Wonders. Multitudinous Miraculous Marvels. Unparalleled Unique Unifications. Tented Temples of Triumphs. Supremely Successful Stalls. Sells' Summer Sautiers. William Sells, Minnie Minnette. Melrose Family, 4 Judges. Donaldson Brothers, Edward Howard. James Bell, Leslie Brothers. Prof. Merrick's Cornet Band. Zeno, 50 Leapers and Tumbler.	Arts of Artists Aggregated. Nature's Newest Novelties. Peculiar Perilous Performances. Merry Make-a-Melange. Roaring Riding Reinsmen. Hunting Hurricane Horsemen. Indescribable Inimitable Innovations. Sells' Series of Surprising Sensations. Astounding Array of Animals. The Triumphant Trio. Academics of Aerie Arts. Great Gorbam, Polly Lee. Lewis Sautier, Alie-Jackson. Prof. White's Dogs, Goats and Monkeys. Johnny Purvis and Donkeys. William House, Denny Stirk. Morse's Plantation Band.
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OVER TWO HUNDRED PERFORMERS ALL TOLD.

# 3 RINGS, 1 THEATER

# 3 TROUPES, 1 STAGE

# PAGENANT

# Promenade.

## ONE THOUSAND MEN AND HORSES!

## EXTRA.

1. That funny fat fellow, button-torcing Billy Burke and the clown elephant Sid.  
2. Only living male and female Hippopotami ever exhibited untamed in the ring.  
3. A living Gifford in addition to all the animals mentioned in the book.  
N.B.—At the end of this season the present syndicate will be dissolved, and the three shows now in one will thereafter resume their usual circuits. No future opportunity will be offered to see them as now combined. Two performances daily, at 1 and 7 p. m.

PAGENANT PARADE AT 10 A. M.  
Excursions on all railroads. Round trip tickets. Immediate Appointments  
Will Exhibit At

**DODGE CITY NOV. 2 LARNED NOV. 3.**

Johnny Purvis, trained donkeys; William Gorman, four-horse rider.

After the show had come and gone, the Larned *Chronoscope* ran a favorable review, certainly at odds with the Dodge City *Democrat*.

"The Great Show.

"Sells Bros.' great show pulled into town last Wednesday morning about 9 o'clock, consisting of about forty cars and in less than two hours they had the whole train unloaded and on the ground near the river ready for business. Just at 12 o'clock the parade was made up Main street and was witnessed by several thousand people. They have a large number of animals, all well trained. Their performance was good and is not excelled by any other show now traveling in this country. They drew the largest crowd that has ever been gotten together for such an occasion in this city."

The Hutchinson *Democrat* made scant mention of the exhibitions of November 5: "Circus day came and passed, all was serene in the city, only two arrests being made. The day was quite cool and the boys only imbibed enough prohibition to keep up a fair circulation."

The show ended its season on November 6, at Augusta, cancelling an appearance billed for Pierce City, Missouri on November 8. Twelve different railroads sent agents to Augusta in a wild scramble for the several hundred passengers who needed transportation to their homes scattered all over the nation. The *Southern Kansas Gazette*, Augusta, gave the show a good send-off: "Sells Bros.' circus and menagerie made the last stand of the season in this city last Saturday. They were just returning from their California trip, and the stock and animals were in excellent condition, the horses especially attracting universal attention. The performance was especially good, and many new features were added to the different acts because of the hilarity of the actors in anticipation of their coming holiday. Willie Sells, the well known dare-devil bareback rider, in his four-horse act, being especially happy taking his departure from the ring with a quotation from Pauline that brought roars of laughter from all in the tent. The circus closed with *Home, Sweet Home*, by the band, which was received with cheers and clapping of all hands by the employees of the company. The disbanding of this show and the discharge of its many employees made Augusta an important place in the eyes of railroads, and they had their brightest and cheeriest representatives on hand to look after their several interests."

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No one knew better the value of a press

handout than did P. T. Barnum, and no one knew better how to get it printed free of charge. During the circus season Barnum had a superb press corps representing him in every town where the show exhibited, and even in the winter Barnum saw to it that his name was kept in the news. It was easier in 1886 than it is in 1990, for every promoter learned the lesson that Barnum was teaching. Kansas was full of four-page newspapers that had a constant struggle to fill their columns. With only enough local news for one page (usually page 3) the editors were pleased to receive any kind of a free publicity tale to help fill the rest of the paper. Barnum, early on, learned how to fill the void, and every winter his writers bombarded the nation's press with stories about the great man himself.

The Topeka *Daily Capital* by 1886 had grown beyond the four page sheet of the smaller towns, but the news of Barnum was still news, and the *Capital*, January 16, ran the following commentary: "Barnum will be in the show business again this year. There is no doubt about it. The aggregated aggregation will be greater than the human mind ever conceived before. The old man is sending out religious papers with a long description of the interior of his home. How the bedrooms are finished and all about the religious mottoes that adorn the walls. These articles are sent out by that master advertiser to find a place free in the reading columns of the weekly papers. Others will follow describing how each in Arope, Erope, Orope, Urope and Yrope fought sixteen separate duels with noblemen of the realm before they secured the wonderful ring streaked and striped animals Mr. Barnum ordered them to secure, if each cost a million of dollars. Each letter from Mr. Barnum's advertising agent will contain the personal complements of Mr. Barnum with the statement that the great aggregation would visit your city and the advance agent place an extensive advertisement in your paper. The further hope is delicately expressed that the editor would insert the descriptive letter of Mr. Barnum's place in Bridgeport."

P. T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth, Combined with The Great London Four Ring Circus and Monster Roman Hippodrome played several dates in Kansas in 1886, including the following: September 27, Topeka; September 28, Junction City; September 29, Emporia; September 30, Parsons and October 1, Ft. Scott.

"The Largest and Richest Amusement Enterprise on the face of the Globe," with

"Capital, \$4,000,000. Daily Expenses, \$7,000," lived by advertising. It seems incredible that a town of less than 30,000 people could support five daily papers, but Topeka in September 1886 did have five dailies (plus a few weeklies), and they all got a share of the Barnum-London advertising budget. The *Journal* headed the list with eleven insertions; the



DAYTON, SATURDAY, JUNE 12

This booklet about the dead Jumbo was used as an advance courier by Barnum in 1886. Pfening Archives.

*Democrat* had six; the *Commonwealth* and the *Capital* each ran four; and the North Topeka *Mail* carried two.

The *Capital* published eight handouts; the *Democrat*, four; the *Journal*, three and the *Commonwealth* and *Mail*, one each. In addition to the well written handouts, the papers furnished shorter comments of their own. One thought prevailed all advertisements and most handouts and was featured prominently in the newspaper ads.

"FAREWELL TOUR-BARNUM'S ADIEU to his AMERICAN PATRONS: "I regret being forced to take away from my fellow citizens an exhibition which they have enthusiastically appreciated and lavished patronized, but the amusement-seeking people of Europe demand the opportunity of seeing this Combination, which has a world-wide reputation, and no Counterpart in any Country. I

have made all arrangements and contracts for its transportation, and in its vast entirety, across the Atlantic. My able and experienced partners will conduct this unparalleled enterprise under my personal supervision. The public's obedient servant. Phineas T. Barnum."

Casting aside Barnum's hypocrisy, it seems safe to speculate that his "able and experienced" partners would return from Europe with enough profit to ease the pain of poor old Barnum's forced sacrifice.

Advertising neglected to name any individual performers, but the dead Jumbo was not ignored: "JUMBO-As Large as Life and Quite as Natural. The Polished Ivory Boned Articulated SKELETON. Only Elephant Skeleton on Exhibition Anywhere."

Also on exhibition, as advertised, was "ALICE--The Affectionate and Distressed Companion of Jumbo." Additional features advertised were "GIANTS-International Congress of the Biggest Men Alive," "The most Marvelous Troupe of Semi-Barbaric ARABS," and a "GREAT MIRAMBA BAND."

Too numerous for details were, "100 Startling Acts and Furious Races, 300 Phenomenal and Daring Artists, 11 Acts going on at the Same Time, 1,000 New Features and Wonderful Attractions. "Admission to Everything, 50 cents. Children under Nine, 25 cents." There was no charge for the "Great Free Street Parade" which left the grounds at 8 o'clock every morning.

A handout in the Topeka *State Journal* of September 15, detailing the size of the show, asked the public to believe that it is "transported upon a railroad train a mile long; has 800 people on its payroll; requires a tent covering ten acres, seating 20,000 persons, with two other tents each 300 feet long. Herds of elephants, camels, 500 horses, 125 ponies, and hundreds of wild animals are under other huge canvases."

On show day, September 27, the *Journal* reported that, "P. T. Barnum's Great London circuses arrived Sunday, and the children and small boys and grown people too, are happy. This circus is certainly the largest that has visited Topeka for a long time. The tents are pitched between Ninth and Tenth avenues and between Jefferson and Adams. The main menagerie tents occupy one block square, while the inner tents, containing the side show and horses, are scattered around on all the available ground obtainable."

"One of Barnum's showmen, who holds his knife and fork with his feet," according to the *Journal*, "created considerable comment at one of the hotels

where he took dinner yesterday."

Barnum's press agent, M. H. Warner, estimated the crowd at the parade to be about 20,000. The *Journal* described Warner as,

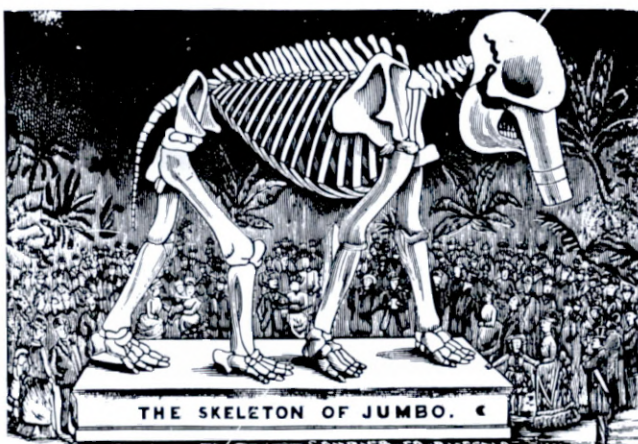
"Pleasant and Gentlemanly.

"M. H. Warner, the popular press agent of Barnum's show, got into the good graces of the newspaper reporters of Topeka to-day by his great kindness. He called at each newspaper office in the city with a hack and having gathered together a representative of each daily in the city showed them all of Barnum's wonders. The show is exactly what it is advertised to be, and so far in excess of the average that no one can afford to miss seeing it. There were fully 10,000 people in the large tent this afternoon.

"Among the wonders the most interesting, perhaps, is the race of giants. Several of the men in this collection range from seven to eight feet high, and weigh from 300 to 400 pounds. Barnum has nothing that is not interesting."

There were 13 giants in the aggregation. Thirty-three of the employees stayed at the Adams House while in Topeka. The train left for Junction City "a little past two o'clock on the 28th."

The *Capital* ran a handout on the 15th that was certainly at odds with the truth: "as now constituted the show consists of 7 advertising cars in advance, upon each of which are 30 men, or 210 in all. There are over 24 advance agents of various kinds. With the show are 800 people, and including the latter are 300 performers (sic). There are 28 tents, the largest 585 feet long and 350 wide, two of 300 feet in length and two of 200 feet. One of these is occupied as an elephant pavilion, containing a herd of elephants, clown elephants and various animals in leash. There are stables containing 500 draught horses and 115 ponies, and over 100 performing horses, besides 32 camels, etc., etc. There is a tent in which the museum is placed, with giants, midgets, dwarfs, skeletons, fat people, armless people and legless people, bearded women, long haired women, etc., and others containing the international congress of giants; the wonderful reproduction of Jumbo, the big ivory boned skeleton; Alice, Jumbo's widow; a troupe of Arabs, the Miramba band. Another with three rings, an elevated stage,



This drawing of Jumbo's skeleton was used in Barnum newspaper ads and other advertising in 1886. Pfening Archives.

and the great Roman hippodrome with its glorious races, and so on. It requires seventy-five railroad cars to move all this material, including two double menageries, with sixty-five cages of rare birds, beasts, and sinewy reptiles, and thirty-three golden carved chariots. The parade is a grand affair, and will represent \$1,500,00 of valuable objects, covering over a mile of ground, and will take place on Monday, September 27 at 8 o'clock in the morning."

In another handout in the *Capital* the press department presented some other statistics, stating that, "When one really considers that it requires three rings, each 45 feet in diameter, and elevated stage 60 x 80 feet, and a huge hippodrome track 40 feet wide and nearly a mile around in which to entertain and delight the audience with 100 marvelous acts of various

This illustration of P. T. Barnum's International Congress of Giants appeared in the 1886 *courier*. Pfening Archives.



kinds, it ceases to be a wonder that an ovation is tendered them everywhere."

Races of all kinds were popular in the mid 1880's and every circus of adequate size produced a number of speed events. A handout of the Barnum-London show spoke of "four-horse Roman chariot racing, double-team Roman standing racing, exciting male and female jockey racing, huge elephant hurdle racing, camel racing, dromedary racing, flat races, foot races, comical sack races, giraffe races, monkey-jockey races, man-horse races, and the most laughable and humorous of all are those known

as the obstacle races. To stimulate the contestants Mr. Barnum has arranged a series of cash prizes."

Nowhere is there an explanation of the "obstacle races," but it is doubtful that they were anywhere near as exciting as the "elephant hurdle racing."

The *Capital* noted—in a handout—the passing of a circus tradition: "The talking and singing clown is a thing of the past, and in his place are scores of pantomimic clowns, not one of whom will speak, but all will act, caper, laugh, contort, distort and do funny things as will make old and young laugh until their sides ache."

The day after the exhibition The *Capital* ran a laudatory review, quite possibly the work of the circus press agent for the events of the day are described in generalities. To begin with, it was claimed that the two performances probably attracted a total of 20,000 patrons. Everything was bigger and better.

"The great feature of the circus is the wonderful performance of the Sylvesters, who are the only lady gymnasts who turn somersaults in mid-air. The performance by the Stirk family on the bicycle, the trapeze balancing by Mlle. Zarah, the gymnastic work of the Julians, the bareback riding of Adelaide Cordona, Miss Viola Rivers, Orin Hollis and Don Bell, the acrobatic performance by Coyle and Don, Mlle. Zarah and her trained doves and Charles White's trick goat, are attractive features."

The crowds on the streets and in the tents were huge causing the *Democrat* to offer the opinion that "Judging by the crowd on the avenue this morning Topeka has 1,000,000 inhabitants."

A handout in the *Democrat* of September 19 pointed out the lofty moral

character of Mr. Barnum's entertainment.

#### "Barnum's Big Show.

"No circus ever exhibits in the great city of New York except P. T. Barnum's tremendous big shows. The reason is very apparent to every one. Every large city in the country is visited by these shows, for their greatest patronage is derived from these intelligent and educated people, and the wonderful attractions under the big tents of the Barnum and London circus are all of such a high moral character, so truly phenomenal and marvelous, so instructing and amusing at the same time, as to receive the endorsement of the best informed people everywhere, judges, lawyers, doctors, politicians, scientists, ladies, children and even the clergy uphold and visit these shows when they would not any other. They all receive information and pleasure in doing so.

"Henry Ward Beecher writes Mr. Barnum 'I should like, if I had time, to visit your gigantic exhibition once a week during the whole season; there is so much to see no one could do the matter justice in less time.'

"William Cullen Bryant said: 'More can be learned in an hour in your tents than in a month from books.'

"Henry W. Longfellow said: 'The circus presented by Mr. Barnum really merits its pretentious title, and is of more actual value as an educational institution for the youth of the country than even he claims for it.' And hundreds of others, equally well known and prominent individuals, have all extravagantly endorsed it. The shows this year are larger, grander, and richer than ever, and will be here on Monday, September 27, and the great street parade will take place in the morning at 8 o'clock. As the entire shows positively visit Europe in the fall, this is the last chance to see them."

The *Capital* ran a handout reporting the show traveling on 80 cars, but this must have been an error for the *Democrat* had the show on 95 railroad cars.

Circus day was a quiet, orderly day in Topeka, the only arrest being a pick-pocket caught in the act. The *Commonwealth* reviewed the show on the 28th:

#### "Barnum's Circus.

"Yesterday Barnum's circus exhibited in this city, and from early morning until late at night the streets gave ev-

IT LEAVES YOU IN THE ZENITH OF ITS FAME.

## GIANT WIDOW ALICE

It affords Mr. Barnum great pleasure and satisfaction, to now introduce to the American public, and particularly to dear old Jumbo's millions of child friends,

STANDING BESIDE GREAT JUMBO'S LIFE-LIKE FORM

AND THE PRODIGIOUS SKELETON OF HER CONSORT,

## HIS WIFE, ALICE

ONLY SECOND TO JUMBO IN SIZE AND FAME,

FULLY HIS EQUAL AS

A PATTERN OF DOCILITY AND AFFECTION

And the pet and playmate of the little folks of England, tens of thousands of whom have ridden upon her back, high back, and held her in special regard since they lost poor Jumbo.

## AROUSED THE WHOLE OF GREAT BRITAIN

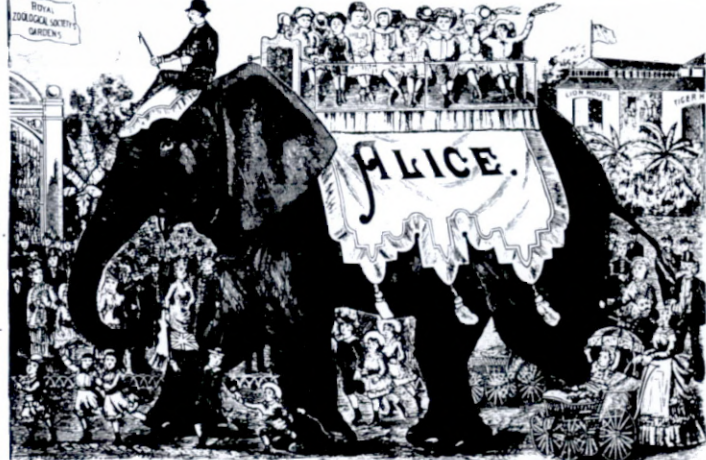
TO SYMPATHY AND PROTEST.

As they affectionately termed her, and she parted from them to become acquainted with Jumbo's little friends on this side the Atlantic, freighted with thousands of tearful farewells and best wishes. Having shared his heart and fame,

THE WORLD-WIDE TOPIC OF THE TIMES

"JUMBO'S LOVING WIFE"

SHE WILL SHARE JUMBO'S POPULARITY HERE



Alice Jumbo's "widow" was highly advertised in 1886. This illustration is from the courier. Pfening Archives.

ery evidence of the fact that there was an unusual crowd in the city. The first event of the day was the street parade, which attracted the attention of thousands of people. It was beyond doubt the most extensive and best parade ever seen in Topeka. In the afternoon and evening the large tent was literally packed with people. The menagerie contained many specimens of natural history which are most rare, and the circus performance was unusually interesting, comprising, as it did, features which were not worm-eaten with age.

"Mr. Morris H. Warner, the popular press agent of Barnum's great show, is

The Miramba Band was pictured in the Barnum 1886 courier. Pfening Archives.



one of the most gentlemanly agents in the business. The many courtesies he ex-tended to the Topeka representatives of the daily papers yesterday will always endear him to the boys in this city."

From Topeka the show moved on to Junction City for the exhibitions of September 28, and from there to Emporia on September 29, traversing a piece of the Katy railroad which ran from Junction City to Emporia, and has since been taken up.

The *Emporia Weekly News* reported between six and eight thousand people on the streets at 10 a. m., to see the parade. The evening performance according to the *News* drew about six thousand persons. The *News* was particularly impressed with the statuary posing of the Gilfort brothers, aerialist Lola Sylvester, and the contortionists.

ers, aerialist Lola Sylvester, and the contortionists.

"Barnum will always find a warm welcome from the Emporia people whenever he comes. His name is a talisman of success."

The *Parsons Sun's* story describing the events of September 30, could well have been a summation of the Barnum-London tour of Kansas:

#### "A Big Crowd of People.

"The fair, Barnum's show and Katie Putnam drew to the city last Thursday probably the largest crowd of people ever in Parsons on any one day. Excursion trains from all directions were run into the city over the Missouri Pacific and the Fort Scott & Gulf railroads, and from Mound Valley over the Parsons & Pacific, while the people from rural districts poured in from daybreak until noon in carriages, wagons and on horseback, until fully twenty thousand visitors were within our borders. The streets were jammed with vehicles of every description, while the sidewalks were packed like sardines in a box with pedestrians, and it was almost impossible a greater part of the day to pass to and fro, but one had to fall in as best he could and move with the crowd. Despite the tremendous number of people there was no drunkenness visible, and no accidents or rows occurred. The police, although especially watchful and active, found no occasion to make any arrests, and no case of pocketpicking has at this

writing been heard of. No wheels of fortune or other games to skin the unsophisticated were run on the streets, at the show grounds or at the fair."

One of the strongest features of the season of 1886 was the dead Jumbo--exhibited in two separate parts, his assembled bones and his stuffed hide. Also featured was Alice, Jumbo's broken hearted "widow." The press department sent out a story that appeared in papers all over the nation, including towns that never saw the show. One such town was McCune and the following sad tale appeared in *The Brick*, May 22:

#### "A Stuffed Jumbo."

"The other day Alice met the stuffed Jumbo, her former mate. She walked slowly up to him, and then stood for a few moments evidently surveying him with wonder. Then she swung her trunk so as to reach Jumbo's mouth. She also touched his trunk in a cautious manner, and then turning her back upon him gave vent to a groan that made the roof of the garden tremble. William Norman, the elephant trainer, Frank Hyatt, the superintendent, and 'Tody' Hamilton, talked to her in their winning way, and she again faced Jumbo. She fondled his trunk, looked straight into his eyes, and again turned her back upon him. Again she groaned, and then walked away as though disgusted with her old partner of her joys and sorrows. She went back to her quarters and continued to mourn. Her keeper, Scott, was appealed to by the spectators. He was asked whether he believed that she recognized Jumbo, and he replied in all seriousness, 'Of course she did. She told me so.' At another time he said, 'I can understand elephant talk, and Alice told me she recognized Jumbo.' Scott seemed very much affected by the meeting. He was Jumbo's old keeper.--Hartford Post."

\*\*\*\*\*

As the new year of 1886 began in Medicine Lodge, James T. Johnson was reaping small reward from the operation of his Amphitheater, but the bloom was not long on the rose, as January neared its close hard times returned to Johnson's enterprises. His greatest success came in the last night of 1885 with the presentation of the drama *The Hidden Hand*, which drew nearly a full house.

The *Barber County Index*, Medicine Lodge, January 22, ran the following handout which reveals the diversity of Johnson's presentation:

"Amusements for Everybody.

"Johnson's amphitheater and circus has been well patronized this week, not

## THIRTY-FIRST ANNUAL TOUR

—OF THE—

# GREAT WESTERN CIRCUS,

Under the personal management of James T. Johnson.

JETMORE, WEDNESDAY JUNE 16TH.



## THE MONSTER LION "NERO"

Will be led in the procession. Something never before attempted by any other Circus in the world. In fact, history fails to give a single instance where the lion has been taught to walk through the streets with as much composure as our household pet, the dog, does, and not as though he had scarcely been out of the depths of the forest three months. Open your eyes and look at the wonder of the entire world.

The only colored Circus and Museum of living wonders. It outranks all wagon shows in the world. This great array of talent, led by the charming child artist, Miss Ella Johnson only 11 years of age, whose feats in the arena are the marvel of the present century, pronounced by the press, East and West, to stand without an equal of her age in the world.

Melville Brothers, Arthur, William, Ernest, America's Premier Acrobats and Double-bar performers.

## A GRAND FREE SHOW

Will be given before each performance, in front of the Pavilion.

## REMEMBER WE SHOW, RAIN OR SHINE. OUR CANVASS IS NEW AND WATER-PROOF.

Admission, 25 and 50 Cents.  
Museum, 10 Cents.  
Concert, 10 Cents.

Parties living at a distance can visit our 3  
Entertainments and arrive home in  
good season.

Great Western Circus newspaper ad used in Jetmore, Kansas. Kansas State Historical Society.

withstanding the severe weather, and the performances have been first class, throughout. As a partial list of attractions, may be mentioned the grand parade, in which the troupe takes part; the trick ponies; two spirited animals taken up from the range a few weeks ago, broken and trained by Prof. Johnson to do marvelous work. Then there is the best slack wire performer in the country; six high and lofty tumblers and acrobats; two India rubber men; the slickest balancer in the country; the child trapeze performer; a very funny clown; song and dance men; a lady soloist; a lady dancer in old familiar steps; trained dogs; a farce every evening,

comprising minstrels and a dozen other attractions. But best of all, a splendid orchestra of eight pieces. All of this every evening in the week, except Sunday. The amphitheater is well heated and provided with comfortable seats. Everything strictly refined. No better place can be found for spending an evening at the amphitheater."

Despite efforts to offer something for everybody, the Amphitheater was on a downhill glide. When an Uncle Tom troupe played Medicine Lodge, Johnson's business manager, Lou West, left with them.

The Medicine Lodge *Cresset* reported on February 11, that efforts were being made to produce a benefit for Johnson.

"Mr. Johnson has made a glaring success, financially, out of the amphitheater and in addition to this has been ill for a number of days and unable to attend to business. Prof. Wagar's band and orchestra have kindly concented to furnish music and a number of people not connected with the Amphitheater will take part in the benefit."

The last newspaper advertisement appeared February 19.

The *Index* reported the benefit to be February 24th, "to help him along in keeping our city on a boom. It is to be hoped that the public will give him a rousing full house, as he promises a rich bill on that night. The play will be Maggie Mitchel's celebrated 'Rough Diamond.' The free list will be entirely suspended on that night."

There are no further reports on the benefit, but it must surely have occurred, for the *Cresset* stated that "Jas. T. Johnson of the amphitheater, has gone east after male and female talent for the coming month. He promises to bring the best that can be secured."

Trouble with musicians was indicated by a statement in the *Cresset*, March 11, that "Prof. Wagar's band are furnishing music for the amphitheater again."

Johnson by mid-March had shifted his thinking to the approaching circus season as noted by the brief comment in the *New York Clipper*, March 27, that, "Jas. T. Johnson advertises for circus people in all branches, and also for an agent."

Another benefit was scheduled for Saturday, April 3, for Johnson's daughter, Miss Ella.

Johnson's efforts to organize a circus did not escape the *Index*. "It is rumored that Jim Johnson expects to start out from here soon with a circus backed by a party in this town. No more permanent investment can be imagined." No investor

was ever named, but one must agree with the *Index* that "no more permanent investment can be imagined."

Early in April Prof. Wagar's band separated from the amphitheater and Johnson's circus plans, but the *Cresset* reported on the 22nd that, "Col. J. T. Johnson's Chicago band arrived at the Amphitheater last Friday."

An increase in the menagerie of the projected circus was announced in the *Cresset*: "Yesterday [March 31] the McKeever boys who live on Cedar creek brought in a large, live wild cat, which they had captured in a wooden trap. The boys has succeeded in tying the varmint and fastening a tin muzzle over his head. They sold him to J. T. Johnson of the amphitheater, who will add him to his collection. It is no small job to capture a wild cat and hog-tie him."

At last everything was ready as it would ever be for James T. Johnson, and the *Cresset*, May 13, proclaimed that, "J. T. Johnson's Great Western Circus leaves us next Sunday [May 16] and will follow the road all summer. Their first stands will be at Pratt and Saratoga, and from there west and north. Col. Johnson has run a show here all winter, at times under very discouraging circumstances, but says he will round up here in the fall."

Johnson ran a handout in the *Cresset*, but no traditional advertisement:

"Farewell Performance.

"The Great Western Circus will give their last performance in Medicine Lodge at the Amphitheater Saturday afternoon and evening.

"The manager takes this method of returning thanks to the citizens for their patronage and support during the past winter, and in closing the season here will spare neither time nor expense in making this a day never to be forgotten by our many friends, by giving you the finest performance ever witnessed in this city.

"The morning will be spent in parading the principal streets, the procession to be led by Prof. Wadrum's celebrated Cornet Band. Do not fail to see the beautiful trained lion Nero, who will be led through the street in the same manner as you would lead your pet dog. Again thanking you for past favors, and hoping to see you all on Saturday. Admission 25 and 50 cents. JAS. T. JOHNSON, Manager."

After the exhibitions of Saturday, May 15, the *Cresset* published the following: "The Great Western Circus and Museum of Living Wonders got out of town last Sunday, after a lively day with creditors, attachments, etc. In fact the nearer it come time for Col. Johnson to leave, the stronger was the attachment some of our citizens had for him. But the Col. is gone and we must say we hope he will succeed this

summer on the road, as any man who has the gall, nerve or whatever you call it, to tackle anything and who will rustle like Johnson, ought to succeed."

J. F. Connely, Johnson's new business manager, had a bit of trouble getting out of Medicine Lodge, his team becoming frightened, and running away. Connely was thrown out of the vehicle but was not seriously injured. After a run of two miles the white ponies were captured, and Connely proceeded on to Pratt.

The *Index* was perfectly frank in stating its opinion of Johnson after the show left town:

"Look Out for Him.

"The Great Western Aggregation of Mammoth Wonders, the Pavilion of Magnificent Thoroughbred Curiosities, the World-Renowned, Fortune-Eclipsing Circus and Menagerie, under the sole of that prince of wind-bags, &c., &c., Jas. T. Johnson, pulled out of this city last Sunday,

**"Look out for Him. . . . The *Index* is not a heavy loser by Johnson, but it takes this method of warning the craft not to trust him under any circumstances."**

**Medicine Lodge *Index*, May 18, 1886**

and the city heaved a sigh of relief which it had not been able to do for the past six months. He threatens to come back here next winter. We hope he will change his mind, for all the 'beats' that ever infested a community, Johnson was the worst. He made promises only to break them, he paid for nothing he could get on credit, and his word was entirely worthless. During a part of his stay here he gave a fair performance, but most of the time it was tame and uninteresting, and he was an injury to the town. The *Index* is not a heavy loser by Johnson, but it takes this method of warning the craft not to trust him under any circumstances. He will beat you in some way as sure as you do. His record before coming here was an index to the character he acted out while here."

C. G. Kline, who took the road with Johnson, wrote back to the *Cresset*, May 24, that, "He is attached to the Col. a few dollars worth and is trying to get it. He says he is having fair success. When he wrote a week ago, the circus was at St. John, bound for Kinsley."

James T. Johnson's Great Western Circus in 1886 played, among others, the following Kansas towns: May 15, Medicine Lodge; May 17, Pratt; May 18, Saratoga; May 20, St. John; May 24, Kinsley; May 26, Greensburg; May 28, Coldwater; May 29, Protection; May 31, Ashland; June 1, Englewood; June 3, Meade Center; June 5, Dodge City; June 7, Cimarron; June 12,

Scott City; June 14, Dighton; June 15, Ravanna; June 16, Jetmore; June 17-18, Jetmore (laid over); June 21, Ness City, Evening only; June 22-25, Ness City (laid over); June 26, Ness City; July 1, Walnut City; July 2, La Crosse; July 5, Ellinwood; July 6-12, Ellinwood (laid over); July 14, Chase (no performance); July 15, Lyons (no performance); July 16-24, Lyons (evening performances only); July 26, Sterling; July 27, Nickerson; August 2-3, Ellsworth; August 13-14, Abilene; August 31, Downs; September 1-2, Downs (no performances); September 3, Downs (evening only); September 4, Downs (no performances); September 6, Red Cloud, Nebraska; September 13, Burr Oak (no performances); September 14-17, Burr Oak (evenings only).

High water prevented the show from playing the follow dates: June 17, Pawnee Valley; June 18, Nonchalanta; June 19, Ness City.

The villages of Pawnee Valley and Nonchalanta were abandoned and do not appear on any current map of Kansas, but both towns were north of Jetmore by only a few miles.

June 21 was scheduled for an unknown town, but the show appeared at Ness City.

Despite a blow down which cancelled the matinee, an exhibition was made in the evening.

Ellis was scheduled for June 22, and WaKeeney for June 23; the 24th and 25th were scheduled for unknown towns; Grainfield was billed for June 26. None of these dates were fulfilled for Johnson was broke and stranded in Ness City.

June 28, was billed for Grinnell, but the billing was blown. Chase, July 6, was abandoned due to the show being held at Ellinwood on an attachment filed by an employee. Johnson was kept at Ellinwood through July 12, and possibly the 13th.

Gaylord, September 2, and Kirwin, September 3 were lost when the show remained at Downs due to the illness of Johnson's daughter, Ella. A benefit performance was given in the evening on the 3rd. The show remained idle in Downs on September 4, getting back on the road on Sunday.

Johnson exhibited at Burr Oak, evenings only, September 13 through 17 at the Old Soldiers' Reunion, losing Monday night to heavy rain.

The first road date of the season was Pratt on May 17.

A feature mentioned in advance publicity was a tame lion which would march in the parade "unchained." "Nero" was a cougar captured in Barber County, Kansas, by Ed Buck of Lake City. The *Kansas*

*Prairie Dog*, Lake City, reported, May 20, that, "Ed Buck has departed with his cougar and is now traveling as a special artist with Johnson's show."

The *Pratt County Press*, Pratt, had a few short statements to make after the show had come and gone: "The four horse team of goats driven through the streets by the clown was a great attraction for the kids."

"Quite a large number of our farmer friends were in with their wives and children on Monday to see Johnson's 'Great three tented combination of wonders.'"

"Johnson's circus on Monday was pretty fairly patronized and the show quite creditable of its kind. The athletic and acrobats exercises were above average."

By 1886 the talking clown had been banned by the Barnum-London show and faced a short future in other gigantic aggregations, but with the smaller shows he was still alive, talking and picking up a bit of small change now and then. According to the *Press*, "The enterprising Blaine Bros., machine men, had the clown in Johnson's colossal aggregation to give their binder, the Deering, a complimentary puff."

Saratoga, a wide spot in the road with a population of a few hundred, had two weekly newspapers in 1886, the *Pratt County Democrat*, and the *Sun*, both of which welcomed the Great Western as the first circus ever to play the town. The exhibitions of May 18, according to the *Sun*, drew a large crowd to town, "but few of the farmers took in the show. The street parade, etc., was not such as to commend it to them as a first class circus. The performers were too much like new beginners. The most of the people attended the night performance. The concert was said to be good. This was Saratoga's first circus. The managers say they did well and while our people have seen much better, it might have been worse."

The *Democrat* was more charitable and gave the show a better review:

"The Circus.

"On Tuesday last The Great Circus, which for a week previous had been advertised extensively by flaming posters and hand bills, put in an appearance and gave two performances to good audiences. This show is just starting on the road, for its summers campaign and had only made one or two stops before reaching Saratoga and of course had not fairly gotten under good headway, and to witness the street parade and the size of the canvas, one would readily come to the conclusion that it was only a 'snide' affair-

-a sort of a ten cent or three for-a-quarter business, but they gave a very good performance nevertheless. The rope-walking performance on the outside of the canvas by Mr. Johnson's 13 year old daughter, was good, their tumbling, leaping, juggling, etc., would do credit to a circus of much larger dimensions. Their menagerie department though only consisting of a tame lion, fat boy and a midget. But as

A peculiar advertisement appeared in the *Kinsley Mercury*, May 22, promoting the exhibitions of May 24. The announcement below is quoted in its entirety:

"An Honest Letter.

To Protect Ourselves From Frauds.

"MEDICINE LODGE, KAS., May 6.

"To Whom it may Concern:

"The bearer of this letter, Mr. Harry Moore, is advertising the Great Western Circus of Mr. James T. Johnson, which is a responsible show and gives general satisfaction. Mr. Johnson has been with the people of this town for some seven months, and I can say that we all regret the departure of the whole company. Mr. Harry Moore is a gentleman, and can be relied on as such. C. D. NELSON, Sheriff Barber Co., Kas."

Occasionally a public official made a favorable-or unfavorable-comment concerning a circus, a one time statement intended only for the home town, but Sheriff Nelson went far beyond such a simple statement and addressed the world--"To Whom It May Concern"--and gave the Great Western a blanket approval. Surely, Nelson was not unaware of the opinion of the Medicine Lodge newspapers and the private opinions of many of the

local citizens. Surely, he knew that Johnson had played many of the townspeople for suckers. Was Nelson an investor in Johnson's enterprise? Was Nelson a sucker?

Following show day the *Mercury* complained that, "The snide circuses seem to have determined to thoroughly punish the people of western Kansas. The second one of the season has come and gone from this town. We are glad to bid them a long farewell. The class of shows that we had here deserve even a more severe go-by than the people gave the last, and that certainly did not pay its expenses. The country people boycotted it almost entirely and the turnout from the town was not large. If they don't do better in the future we suggest a general boycott."

The first "snide" show referred to by the *Mercury* was that of Col. G. W. Hall which appeared on May 12.

"After the circus Monday night," the suffering *Mercury* reported, "the night was made hideous by the whopping and yelling indulged in on the streets of our town. We didn't hear of the night watch being around."

The letter of Sheriff Nelson headed the advertising for the exhibitions of May 28, at Coldwater, followed by a long list of reasons for attending the show.

**GO SEE IT!**

THE

**GREAT WESTERN CIRCUS**

Will Exhibit--Rain or Shine--Afternoon and Evening, at

**WA-KEENEY, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23**

**AN HONEST LETTER,  
To Protect Ourselves From Frauds.**

Office of SHERIFF OF BARBER COUNTY.

C. D. NELSON, Sheriff.  
WM. LINDHAY, Under Sheriff.

MEDICINE LODGE, KANSAS, May 9, 1886.

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

The bearer of this letter, Mr. Harry Moore, is advertising the Great Western Circus of Mr. James T. Johnson, which is a responsible show and gives general satisfaction. James T. Johnson has been with the people of this town seven months, and I can say that we all regret the departure of the whole company. Mr. Harry Moore is a gentleman, and can be relied on as such.

Respectfully,

C. D. NELSON, Sheriff of Barber Co., Kas.

**DON'T MISS IT!**

**The Great Western Circus.**

The Great Western Circus newspaper advertisement in WaKeeney carried good words from the sheriff of Barber County. Was he an investor? Kansas State Historical Society.

this is the first circus that ever visited Saratoga, we can afford to overlook some of the lacking points, but when we get our new railroad completed and begin to put on metropolitan airs we will send for old P. T. Barnum to come with his entire caravan and give us a performance."

St. John, May 20, gave the show scant recognition. The *Advance* reported the presence of agent Moore, who announced that no gamblers, lottery prize sharks or confidence men accompanied the show.

The St. John *Sun* dispensed with all mention of the Great Western, except to state that, "We go to press early this week in order to let the force attend the circus."

When Ed Buck made a flying visit to Lake City, the *Kansas Prairie Dog*, May 27, reported that, "Ed says Johnson is meeting with remarkable success in the show business, while at St. John the citizens presented him with a town lot."

A careful search of the St. John papers failed to provide any confirmation of Buck's story.

"Don't Miss It!

The Great Western Circus.

"BECAUSE—No gambling or intoxicated persons will be allowed on the show grounds. We protect our patrons, and our performers are refined. Not one word said or action done that would mar the feelings of the most fastidious lady or gentleman.

"BECAUSE—It has better artists in every branch of the profession than any other one-ring circus.

"BECAUSE—Each member of the company is a lady or gentleman, and finished performers in their different lines.

"BECAUSE—The entire show is under the supervision of Jas. T. Johnson, who, with his herd of trained horses, ponies and mules, is a complete show in himself, and justly entitles him to the position of the world's able showman.

"BECAUSE—Mrs. Jas. T. Johnson heads the list of female equestriennes, and stands today the most finished and graceful artiste in the arena.

"BECAUSE—The celebrated Johnson sisters, four in number, in their parlor gymnastics, give the most pleasing and attractive parlor performance ever witnessed.

"BECAUSE—It has better leapers, tumblers and general performers than any other show.

"BECAUSE—This show does just as it advertises, and does not deceive the public by false representations on outside parades to humbug the public.

"BECAUSE—It has the best clowns in the circus profession engaged with it for this season.

"BECAUSE—It has the finest band and orchestra that can be found in the musical profession discoursing popular airs from the most celebrated authors.

"BECAUSE—This show is conducted on a strictly moral system and is worth the patronage of all classes, and commends itself to the clergy in particular.

"BECAUSE—No swindling lemonade vendors are allowed to harass the patrons of this show and extort money from and annoy them during the performance.

"BECAUSE—Every lady and gentleman connected with this Circus do their utmost to elevate the performance and give a strictly classical and intellectual entertainment, and are always welcome back to the same town.

"BECAUSE—Each performer receives the highest salary paid to artists in their line, thereby enabling the public to witness the finest show in the world for 50 cents; children 25 cents.

"BECAUSE—This circus has engaged with it twelve concert people, eight ladies and four gentlemen, who render the most popular songs and execute the most artistic song and dances, plantation sketches,

negro melodies, instrumental solos, etc., giving a highly enjoyable and intellectual concert for the small sum of ten cents.

"Children with parents free.

"Admission 50 Cts. Children 25 Cts. Museum 10 Cts. Concert 10 Cts.

"Will exhibit Rain or Shine—Afternoon Evening, at Coldwater, Friday, May 28."

In spite of all the reasons given, only "A fair crowd was in attendance," according to the *Coldwater Review*.

The *Clark County Clipper*, Ashland, reviewing the performance of Monday, May 31, had some nice things to say: "Last Monday witnessed the largest crowd ever known in Ashland.


"Johnson's Great Western Circus took in the city Monday and was greeted with a good crowd both afternoon and night. Their horses were affected with the pink eye so they could not be used. Their tumblers and acrobatic performers were splendid and displayed a great deal of skill and strength and would compare with the best acrobatic performers. Miss Ella Johnson performed some daring feats

on the trapeze. Little Edna, the youthful snake charmer, was loudly applauded. The audience seemed satisfied and often well pleased."

At Meade Center, June 3, the *Meade County Globe* reported, June 4, that, "The circus yesterday was well attended in the afternoon and crowded in the evening, and so far as we can learn gave complete satisfaction. The ring show was an agreeable disappointment to every one, the leaping, tumbling and horizontal bar work being exceptionally good, while the flying ring act by Miss Johnson was also deserving of great praise. The entire combination certainly rendered value received. We will be glad to see the Great Western Circus again."

Dodge City in 1886 had three weekly newspapers all of which practically ignored the exhibitions of June 5. The total press coverage is quoted below:

"Today hope no more overland circuses will visit town for several years to come. They never bring any money with them, but take away a great deal from our peo-



## It would make P.T. Barnum proud...

# THE AMERICAN CIRCUS

### An Illustrated History

By John Culhane

From Thomas Pool in 1786, drinking a glass of wine, standing on the back of a galloping horse... to Gunther Gebel-Williams in 1989, controlling 20 elephants and 12 horses in three rings with a single spoken command...

From clown John Durang in 1797, burlesquing Pool... to Denis Lacombe, caricaturing a symphony conductor on the 1988 tour of Cirque du Soleil...

From Jumbo, tent blowdowns, and the quest for the quadruple somersault... to the Flatfoots, Tom Thumb, Annie Oakley, the Ringlings, Emmett Kelly and a cast of thousands...

THE AMERICAN CIRCUS brilliantly captures the entire experience of the circus in America. Here is the first full chronicle of the good days and the bad, of circuses playing to packed arenas as well as singlering tent shows thrilling smaller, but no less enthusiastic, audiences. Over 150 glorious photographs, some rare, provide a three-dimensional view of circus life; not just Clyde Beatty in the ring with 40 lions, but Beatty in the back lot, playing with his dog. THE AMERICAN CIRCUS brings a sense of not only what the circus in America has been, but of who went to see it, where, what they felt about what they saw, and how it all helped shape the American consciousness.

"Complete, exacting, refreshingly well written and loaded with fascinating bits of circus lore." —Charles Philip Fox, author of *The Circus in America*

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City \_\_\_\_\_ State & Zip \_\_\_\_\_



ple, a number of whom are still 'suckers,'" *The Sun*, Dodge City.

"There was a circus in town Saturday. This is a poor county for a circus." *Dodge City Times*.

Sometimes the news reports do not provide enough information for one to know what happened and to whom. For example, on June 4, the *Barber County Index*, Medicine Lodge, stated that, "Abbey's outfit has left the Johnson show, and is working the Santa Fe road west from Dodge City." In all of the research on James T. Johnson, there is no other mention of "Abbey's outfit." Who was Abbey? And how did he "work" the Santa Fe?

The first circus ever to play Scott City was the Great Western which appeared there on June 12. The performances, according to the *Scott County News*, "were ordinarily well attended considering from a new county standpoint, the people generally were well satisfied with the performances."

The following Monday, June 14, Johnson scored another first by being the first circus ever to play Dighton. The *Dighton Journal* was impressed:

"GREAT WESTERN CIRCUS.

"The First to Exhibit in Dighton.

"James T. Johnson's Great Western Circus gave an exhibition on the green west of the Avenue, Monday afternoon and evening. The people of this highly moral aggregation gave a street parade in the afternoon. Just before the entrance to the big show was opened, a very pretty little girl made a perilous high wire ascension, receiving the admiration of a large assembly of ladies and gentlemen.

"The exhibition under the canvas consisted of the usual high and lofty tumbling, quaint antics and droll jokes by the clowns, clog dancing and snatches of some good old songs and ballads.

"Taken all together the performance was much better than is usually found under a small tent.

"Mr. Johnson is an old showman, and makes an honest effort to please the public. The people traveling with him conduct themselves nicely and made a good impression.

"Harry Moore, the general agent, met the company here and we found him to be a perfect gentleman."

Ravanna—the post office called it Cowland—had little to say about the Great Western following the exhibitions June 15. "There was no extra stir in town on Tuesday, and yet the circus was well attended." Ravanna was ultimately abandoned and cannot be found on maps today.

For the exhibitions at Jetmore on June 16, the show used a new ad in the *Hodgman County Scimitar*. Featured was "THE MONSTER LION 'NERO'." No mention

was made of the cougar, panther or mountain lion, and the public was free to visualize Nero as the black-maned monarch of all Africa, if they so desired.

"THE MONSTER LION 'NERO' Will be led in the procession. Something never before attempted by any other Circus in the world. In fact, history fails to give a single instance where the lion has been taught to walk through the streets with as much concern as our household pet, the dog, does, and not as though he had scarcely been out of the depths of the forest three months. Open your eyes and look at the wonder of the entire world."

Finishing with Nero the ad remarked upon the other wonders with the Johnson aggregation.

"The only colossal Circus and Museum

**"Lots of people were in town Saturday, but the show failed to 'show up,' on account of swollen streams."**

*Ness City Times, June 21, 1886*

of living wonders. It outranks all wagon shows in the world. This great array of talent, led by the charming child artists, M'lle Ella Johnson only 11 years of age, whose feats in the arena are the marvel of the present century, pronounced by the press, East and West, to stand without an equal of her age in the world.

"Melville Brothers, Arthur, William, Ernest, America's Premier Acrobats and Double-bar performers."

An undescribed free act was offered before every performance, probably M'lle Ella walking a wire to the top of the top of the center pole as she did at many other towns.

The canvas was "NEW AND WATER-PROOF," and exhibitions were given "Rain or Shine.

"Parties living at a distance can visit our 3 Entertainments and arrive home in good season."

The *Scimitar* reviewed the show on the 19th, poking fun at the aggregation but also applauding its virtues.

"The show did come with the same actors, same circus, same clowns, same side show, same lemonade, same candy and same everything but the elephant and ginger bread. The elephant and ginger bread maker both died at Ravanna and Mr. Enos, the editor of the *Sod House*, has been detailed to write their obituary which will appear in the next issue of his paper. When the elephant died they procured two very fine goats which answer the same purpose and they have concluded to do without the poor gin-

gerbread cuss. The only fault that was found with the lemonade was that the dog drank out of it before the people, but that did not hurt it much as it saved lemons and sugar. But laying all jokes aside, the circus was a success and they fulfilled each representation made in their advertisement. Their tumblers could hardly be beaten and Miss Ella Johnson, the aerial queen, did equally as well. Many other acts were done that we have not space to enumerate and should the show return, we think it probable that fully as many people would be present as were this time."

It was a time when every reporter thought he was another Mark Twain.

The big news occurred after the show had left Jetmore, en route to Pawnee Valley, early in the morning of the 17th. A severe wind-storm with rain, followed by hail, struck the show and the town of Jetmore, savagely. The *Jetmore Reveille* told the story best: "The circus company had just left town and when about one mile out, received the full force of the

hurricane. The horses turned into madness by the cutting, bruising hail, became simply unmanageable, and dashed hither and thither in their wild fury, overturning wagons and contents and spreading wreck and ruin all around. Not seeing the wire fences the poor brutes rushed on them and added new torture to that which they already suffered. Many were rendered helpless, and many are totally ruined. Nor did the men suffer the less, losing their hats in the general wreck, the hail pelted their pates into a jelly and bid affair to kill them entirely. Forgetful of themselves they did all they could to save the horses. Two of their number were compelled to take to their beds and receive a doctor's care, while all adjourned to town to mend up as best they could."

For two days the Great Western remained in Jetmore, pulling itself together, patching the equipment and licking its wounds. Two towns were lost—Pawnee Valley on June 17 and Nonchalanta on the 18th.

Ness City was scheduled for June 19, but two days of heavy rain following the hail storm made seas of mud out of the poor roads and all the streams were running bank full and unfordable, resulting in another blown date.

"Lots of people were in town Saturday," according to the *Ness City Times*, "but the show failed to 'show up,' on account of swollen streams."

Johnson finally overcame the 25 miles of hell between Jetmore and Ness City, arriving on June 21.

The *Times* bragged that "A town that can turn out after a hard rain, and when the streets are ankle deep with mud, and without an hour of previous announcement, a crowd large enough to fill a great circus tent, is not to be sneezed at, surely. Ness City did that very thing Monday evening."

The *Times* told the rest of the story in another paragraph: "Well, the circus did finally arrive, but it was two days behind time. Monday afternoon the tents were put up in good shape and an exhibition announced to begin at 2 p. m. About a hundred had entered the main tent and the show had just commenced when a breeze came up from the north, and in less than five minutes the great tent was flat on the ground. Then it rained for two or three hours, hard and without intermission, but it cleared up about 4 or 5 o'clock, the tents were put up again and an evening exhibition given. About 300 hundred persons were upon the seats."

The worst of the news was reported by the *Times*, June 24: "The circus, after passing through several storms, delays on account of high water, and the necessary failure to meet a number of appointments, found itself in sorry plight upon arriving at this place. The till was empty, and numerous bills unpaid. As a consequence, re-organization was necessary. Mr. Johnson has turned it over to Barber & Conley, who will get everything in good shape to-day and to-morrow, and Saturday they will exhibit here."

The Ness City *Graphic* reported that, "The show will now be under the management of Barber & Conley, proprietors."

The "Conley" referred to was probably Johnson's business manager, J. M. Connelly. The Barber mentioned may have been County Clerk Geo. D. Barber. The claim that these men were "proprietors" should be viewed with skepticism, for no further mention is made of them, but Johnson continued to struggle onward.

The Great Western exhibited in Ness City on June 26, but the week spent in re-organizing resulted in blown dates: Ellis on June 22; WaKeeney on June 23; Grainfield on June 26 and Grinnell on June 28.

The Coldwater *Review*, July 9, reprinted a story from the *Barber County Index*, Medicine Lodge, concerning the condition of the Great Western: "Ed Buck returned this week from his tour with Johnson's great circus and menagerie. He left the outfit at Ness City, in Ness county, and gave it as his opinion that the show would not be able to proceed further than there. Prior to arriving at Dodge City, the show made some money, but lost its grip after leaving there. The last bad fortune overtook the outfit on the 17th of June when a most severe hail storm caught it on the road be-

tween Jetmore and Ness City, stampeding the teams, overturning the wagons and smashing things up generally. The men were badly bruised up. Ed brought his cougar home with him and has had enough circus to last him a life time."

When the Great Western finally moved from Ness City, several local musicians went along.

Walnut City, now known as Rush Center, was played on July 1. Getting there provided another thorn in Johnson's crown, according to the Walnut City *Herald*: "Mr. Johnson, manager of the Great Western Circus, met with quite a painful accident while en route from Ness City to this place on last Wednesday afternoon by being thrown from his buggy under the heels of his horses and sustaining injury by being kicked several times."

The *Herald* stated that the exhibitions were "pronounced very fair by all who attended. The performances of some of the actors was fully up to the average of more metropolitan affairs and were greeted with surprise by the audience."

The only comments of the La Crosse *Chieftan* concerning the exhibitions of Friday July 2, related to a "slur" against the La Crosse town band: "The *Herald* [Walnut City] of last week slurs the La Crosse

**"For a low-priced show it was far above the average, and considering the serious loss it had lately sustained from a cyclone, it does credit to Mr. Johnson's ability as a manager."**

*Ellinwood Weekly Record, July 14, 1886*

band in an unseemly manner, stating that the boys were mad because they did not get to play for the Great (?) Western circus company. The truth of the matter is that the boys did not want to play, but the manager of the circus was very anxious to get them, offering to pay for a team with which to go after the boys that were out of town. When the question arose as to what the band would receive, it was learned that they wanted the boys to play for comps--the same as the Walnut City band did--and this the boys would not do. They are not anxious to play for a one-horse circus as to follow it around to get to wear its second hand uniforms and pay their own board."

More trouble awaited Johnson at Ellinwood on July 5, when the show was attached by the sheriff of Barton county in an effort to collect money owed to the people on the show. The trial came off a week later and unnamed plaintiff was awarded \$12.00. The attachment kept

Johnson in Ellinwood for eight days, causing the loss of Chase, billed for July 6.

On Wednesday July 14, day on which the thermometer recorded 120 degrees, the show played Chase. The *Weekly Record* thought that, "For a low-priced show it was far above the average, and considering the serious loss it had lately sustained from a cyclone, it does credit to Mr. Johnson's ability as a manager."

The Great Western opened in Lyons on July 15 for a run of nine days, exhibiting evenings through July 24, Sunday off. The *Central Kansas Democrat* commented that, "They are not a monster aggregation, yet they are gentlemen and gave the best cheap entertainment yet given in Lyons."

The Lyons *Republican* agreed, "Their show gives quite good satisfaction."

Apparently Johnson did not carry a band but hired musicians in every town. At Sterling on July 26, he hired members of the town band and took them along when the show moved to Nickerson for exhibitions on July 27.

When Harry Moore, heading the advance, appeared in Nickerson, July 23, preparing for the exhibitions of July 27, he was arrested by City Marshal Yale at the request of the marshal at Sterling. Moore was arrested for swindling a Sterling man out of a gold watch, and was taken back to Sterling for a hearing. Another Johnson employee named Fitzgerald was also taken in on the same charge. On examination of the evidence the judge released Moore, but Fitzgerald was bound over for trial.

The Great Western exhibited two days in Ellsworth, August 2 and 3. The Ellsworth *Democrat* reported that, "The

Great Western Circus gave our city a call and showed two days to good business, and gained the best of satisfaction to all who attended. The show is first class in all respects, no street fakirs, or gambling allowed with the show."

"The audiences which attended the Great Western Circus was composed largely of the ladies of Ellsworth,"

While at Ellsworth the show was attached by Harry Moore for back pay. The outcome is not known, but the show was not detained and Harry Moore dropped from view.

The *Democrat* reported that the day after Johnson left town, "A most excellent contortionist and general circus performer gave a couple of exhibitions of his skill at Seitz's corner, yesterday morning and evening. He attracted a large crowd and took up a collection which amounted to perhaps five or six dollars. He is the best that ever struck this city."

Speaking of the exhibitions August 13 and 14, the Abilene *Gazette* reported that, "Johnson's Great Western Circus concluded its stay in this city last night having given four performances to good sized audiences. The show, although a small one, nevertheless is good, and is worthy of patronage."

Four "good sized" audiences should have put some money in the till—but not for the performers. The *Gazette* carried the following story:

"A Benefit Performance,

"The three Melville Bros. and Mr. Leahan, who left the Great Western circus in this city for the reason that they had been performing for the last four months with no prospect of seeing any ducats, gave a clever street performance last evening along side of the GAZETTE band stand, the band boys donating them the music, which attracted a large crowd.

"They are clever artists, and fully deserving of the liberality show them last evening in the shape of a shower of nickels, dimes and quarters from the crowd. The boys were flat broke, and will work their way back east by giving street shows at towns along the line of road. We commend them to the citizens of our neighboring cities as gentlemanly young men, and worthy of a good 'boost' to keep them on their homeward way."

The Great Western arrived in Downs in the rain for the exhibitions of August 31. The one day stand turned into a stay of five days, the delay being due to the illness of Johnson's daughter.

The Downs *Chief* ran the announcement below on Friday, September 31:

"At The Rink Tonight.

"A benefit will be given by the citizens of Downs, to little Ella Johnson, who is a member of the Great Western Circus, and is lying ill in our town, the show being detained here on that account. A first-class entertainment will be given, strictly moral in every respect. Let everybody go and lend a helping hand. Admittance for children 10 cents. Adults 25 cents."

Gaylord, billed for September 2, was blown due to the misfortune at Downs, but the Gaylord *Herald* expressed a reason different from illness, stating that the show was "detained at Downs by some avaricious Shylock for a small amount of filthy lucre."

The *Central Kansas Democrat*, Lyons, September 9, published a story that strongly supports the Gaylord paper: "J. H. Reynolds, of the Great Western (fraud) Circus, arrived in town last Saturday, and says the concern wound up the little ball of stealage at Downs, in Osborn county, last Thursday. They turned their men out with not a cent to go home on. The Mel-

villes left them at Abilene without a dollar, and were forced to go to work on the streets to pay their board."

The show left Downs on September 5, for Red Cloud, Nebraska.

The Great Western played September 13 through the 17th, Monday through Friday, evenings only, at the Old Soldiers' Reunion at Burr Oak. The show drew a good crowd on Thursday, September 16, according to the Burr Oak *Herald*, but the week was marred by the usual Johnson luck. "Owing to the rain the Great Western Circus failed to exhibit on Monday evening."

The final note of the season of 1886 for the Great Western Circus appeared in the *Jewell County Monitor*, Mankato, September 22.

"Two contortionists from the Great Western Show left that institution at Burr Oak owing to their inability to collect their pay, and gave an exhibition on our streets for the purpose of raising funds to proceed on their journey with. They were liberally rewarded."

After such a season as 1886, it is permissible to ask, "Who—other than Johnson—had worse luck than James T. Johnson?"

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